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A Mystery Story of Burma

By

S. B. H. HURST

"I WANT you to look into this business, Bugs," said Lord Cameron, Governor of Burma.

Horace Sinnat, of the secret service of India, nodded.

"It's pretty average mysterious," he answered.

"It is," replied the governor. "Fact is, I can only imagine that some chap in an airplane did it. But the pilots and my own common sense tell me that no man in an airplane could do it. Besides, an airplane would make a hellish noise and, so far as we can find out, the jewels were taken without a sound being made. None of the priests at the pagoda heard a thing.

"Mysterious is not the word—it's the most uncanny thing that has happened during my administration. And there's the devil to pay. I can't figure it out."

"Neither can I," answered Bugs. "Here we have the great Shwe-maw-daw pagoda, the most holy if not the largest pagoda in Burma. It's not as if it wasn't the most conspicuous object in the city."

The looted pagoda stood in the ancient city of Pegu, which was the capital of Burma before Rangoon. The pagoda was more than three hundred and fifty feet high, not counting the eminence upon which it stood. It had no interior. It was a solid stupa of brick, raised over a relic chamber, and covered with pure gold from base to summit. On the very top of the pagoda, set in heavy gold filigree, were some magnificent rubies and other jewels. The gold on the pagoda was renewed every generation, and every

The Pagoda of Gold

so often, with appropriate ceremonies, a scaffolding of bamboo was erected and priests climbed up to see if the jewels were all right. This was mere routine, since the filigree was so strong that no wind could disturb it. It had been on the top of that pagoda for centuries.

It was quite a job to erect the scaffold, taking a lot of time. No man, not even a monkey, could climb up outside the pagoda, which had the shape of a cone, and was perfectly smooth. Yet Pegu woke one fine morning to discover that the age-old, priceless jewels had vanished from the top of the pagoda. The filigree work had been smashed at its base by something that cut like an ax, and stolen with the stones.

"It's uncanny, Cameron," said Bugs. "No monkey could climb up to the jewels, yet some one appears to have got up there with an ax—and without disturbing any of the priests. And it's not any inside job, either. The priests would not do such a thing. As soon would the Archbishop of Canterbury desecrate and rob the altar of the cathedral. Besides, a priest could not do it. It requires fifty men—more than that—to rig the scaffold, and takes skill and time. And to suggest fifty sacrilegious priests is absurd. No way to get at the jewels from the outside, and no way inside. It's uncanny—but what's the use of guessing? I'll go to Pegu!"

The virus of revolution had spread from India to Burma, but nowhere had Bugs found the talk so threatening as among the people with whom he traveled

to Pegu. He was an apparently well-to-do Burmese with a taste for fancy *sarongs* and loud colors of green and yellow; and he orated with the other Burmese about the time—soon coming—when a Burmese would be king of Burma, and the British driven into the sea. He was keenly anxious to find, as he had been for months, some lead to the heads of the conspiracy.

He reached Pegu at noon. It was very hot. Bugs swaggered in his fancy raiment. He seemed to want the many pretty Burmese women to admire him. He made his way on foot toward the great pagoda—a perspiring pilgrim on the way to leave some donation toward the eternal ornamentation of the shrine. Many beggars accosted him, but he lifted his nose and paid no attention to their cries. He reached the pagoda and bowed ceremoniously to an old priest who sat in the shade with a chessboard; then he mingled with the worshipers on the platform which surrounds the pagoda, and which has a perimeter of more than twelve hundred feet. He stared upward, as well as he could for the glitter of sunlight on pure gold, but of course he could not see the summit of the great building from where he stood—curving above him like a vast, golden beehive.

"Now, how?"

And then the solution came to him with an amazing and amusing suddenness!

"And Cameron and me promoting mysteries when it was so simple," he chuckled. "Simple yet devilishly complicated, and going down awfully deep in its roots. Simple yet difficult, like all simple things... Let's look a bit further."

HE LEFT a rather lavish donation of taxpayers' money at the shrine, and felt it was a good investment, although he could not as yet imagine what the dividends would be like; then he walked down the incline, away from the pagoda, toward some English shops. In these he bought two things: a pair of powerful binoculars and a newspaper some days old—dated the night the jewels had been taken. He wrapped the glasses in the paper, tucked the package under his arm and walked warmly up the hill again. The heat served to irritate him, when he was already annoyed at what he called his stupidity in not seeing at once how the theft had been accomplished.

"But his accomplice—there's the rub," thought Bugs between moments of politely telling certain beggars to go to an even warmer place than Pegu. "That accomplice may be the kernel of the nut. And what a weary search for the principal, let alone his helper, even if money was the sole object—which I suppose it was."

At that hour the streets were not so crowded. Bugs walked east, away from the pagoda, looking carefully at the buildings.

"The question is, from which side did he operate?" he reflected. Then with an exclamation of annoyance he hastily opened the newspaper, putting the glasses under his clothes, out of sight. "I may blame the heat, but I'm still stupid," he growled as he found a bit of shade and squatted down to read the paper.

"Of course! Of course! Hum—moon sets at six-thirty—picture of a crescent on its back . . . Now, let's see. Yes, he operated from the east. Ah, clever! Had it all figured out. Intelligent chap—Hullo, what's this? Curious. Is this a coincidence or did this remarkable stealer of unstealable jewels figure *this* out, too?"

It was a short article in the paper about the Chinese New Year, and the evidently youthful reporter commented lavishly upon the "spiritual machine guns of our excellent Chinese citizens—old Nankin crackers with which they loudly drive away the devils."

"Very suggestive," muttered Bugs. "And whether this remarkable thief calculated upon these 'spiritual machine guns' or not, they were certainly a help to him."

He wrapped the glasses again in the paper, and walked on.

"Give him about two hundred yards,"

he muttered. "Not much more, maybe quite a bit less—can't tell yet. The buildings will tell me. Let's see!"

A tall Sikh policeman watched Bugs curiously. The Sikh had nothing else to do, and Bugs' actions were sufficiently unusual. He was acting like a man who wanted to buy the street and was making a preparatory examination. Finally he became convinced that a very old four-story affair of wood, with a sort of false brick front, was the one he wanted, and he went down an alley in order to see about the back door. Except for a mixed Burmese store on the ground floor front the building was tenantless, tumbling with age, dust and general decrepitude.

"Certainly he would choose this place." Bugs strolled down the alley. "No one to observe him or anything."

At that moment he became aware of stealthy footsteps— Bugs had very sharp ears—and he grinned. He had of course observed the interested Sikh, and recognized him, for there were very few policemen of the Punjab race in either Rangoon or Pegu whom Bugs did not know intimately. So Bugs reached the end of the alley and turned to the back of the building and the rickety back door. Upon the latch of this he had laid his hand when the policeman stopped him with powerful remonstrances. He said unkind things in Burmese, and gripped Bugs' wrist. Jail was for robbers, and empty buildings were guarded by the police. Bugs protested.

"Would such a rich man as I am rob, police-walla? Behold, you have this day insulted me—the owner of this fine house!"

The policeman relinquished his grip. That this offensively dressed Burmese—offensive to a Sikh clothed entirely in white—might own the place had not occurred to him. But he was a well trained policeman, and demanded proof of ownership. The keeper of the shop would identify his landlord.

"Nay, Ruttan Singh," drawled Bugs in Hindustani, "that dealer in stinking fish knows me not. How have you been since we last worked together?"

The tall man bent forward, straightened up and saluted.

"Before God, Sinnat sahib, you are a magician. You could make a living as a holy man! I ask pardon. The building is yours. Do you enter alone or shall I come with you?"

"Thanks, Ruttan Singh. I will, however, go alone just now. But stay within call, in case I need your help."

The big man saluted proudly, and walked back down the alley. Bugs pushed open the back door and entered. The place seemed dark after the glare. The steps leading from floor to floor creaked and groaned as Bugs went up. On the top floor he found a small room, with a ladder leading to a hatchway in the roof. Bugs gained the roof and found himself standing well above the rest of Pegu. Only the pagoda stood higher—and that not much so. He dropped behind the parapet which ran around the roof. He had no wish to be seen. Bugs went to the corner of the roof nearest the pagoda. On his knees, only his head above the parapet, he stared through his binoculars . . .

"YES," he muttered, as the broken base of the gold filigree came into focus—the priests having left things as the thief left them—"yes; mighty like a very sharp and heavy ax in the hands of a strong man. From where I am it is perhaps one hundred and fifty yards—certainly not more. Comparatively simple, what?" He dispensed with the glasses, and began carefully to look amid the dust and rubbish of the roof—looking for something which he did not find.

"Careful chap," said Bugs to himself. "I think he even smoothed down the dust a bit—but not enough, which shows he was no woodsman—to hide his tracks. And the moon was setting, and the top of the pagoda bears from here just about W.N.W.—which makes my calculations work out . . . This old building has

served my turn—as it did the thief's."

When Bugs returned to the street, he chatted for a few minutes with Ruttan Singh, who, although bursting with curiosity, was too polite even to mention the old building again. Bugs relieved his mind by saying:

"I trust I shall need your help in this affair, Ruttan Singh. *Salaam.*"

"*Salaam, burra sahib.*"

Bugs walked down the street, and turned in the direction of the old cemetery. Near the cemetery was a street of poverty—poor, very poor even for a native street. The sun was westering, and a few cooking pots had already started the evening meal, their smoke rising like ghostly fingers here and there about the city. But in the old lane of the poor and aged there was no smoke, as yet. By and by these outcasts of a wealthy world would gather together by their one small, communal fire and cook their scraps. No beggars lived there, for beggars are wealthy . . .

At the end of the street was a hut covering a godown. The sacred privacy of the East kept the secret of this place, which looked as poor as the rest—but was not. For in this place lived Bugs' eleven remarkable men of the jungles, not one of whom had much more education than a monkey, but all of whom were of a value beyond price to the secret service man. They could go anywhere, and never forgot directions; they could find their way through trackless jungles or congested cities, as dogs find their way . . . There had been twelve, but one had died for Bugs, who was their god.

As he swaggered, if a bit tiredly, this rich Burmese, the poor regarded him enviously. So he turned behind the godown of his men, and entered. They jumped from their resting places, for a moment like disturbed tigers, whose den has been outraged. Then they recognized Bugs—for they were accustomed to his disguises—and they crowded about him, worshiping.

"But why so long and no word to us, thy people, sahib?" asked one who was known as the Snake-man, reproachfully.

Bugs laughed. He was as glad to be with his men as they were to have him with them.

"Oh, a long tale, surely, my children. And just now—but I am glad to see thine honest faces!—just now I am thirsty. From my place bring the bottle, and the soda *panee.* Then I will wash my face, and change—for there is much to do ere I sleep this night. And I shall need your help, my children."

Each had his duty to Bugs—a special, jealously guarded duty—when in the godown. One brought the whisky and soda, another soap and warm water, another prepared and laid out the ordinary clothes of a European. Bugs drank, washed the makeup off his very brown, sunburned face, and changed his clothes.

"The thing was done by a white man," he thought as he changed. "No native could have done it. But no white man could have done it alone. And, somehow, I can't see the accomplice as a white man, while visualizing him as a native is just as difficult . . . "

He addressed his men—

"You may have heard that the jewels have been taken from the top of the pagoda?"

Their leader, the Snake-man, grinned and answered:

"Good, sahib! Very good!"

Bugs laughed.

"You darned old animist, your wizards have surely taught you well—from their point of view; anything Buddhist is vile, eh? But I see you have not heard."

"Nay, sahib, we do not concern ourselves about the troubles of the Buddhists," answered the Snake-man. "Not until our father tells us to. Is it our father's desire that we go out and recover these jewels which our father tells us have been stolen?"

"I am seeking them, but more particularly do I seek the thief," said Bugs. "Of a certainty do I need—as always—your help. I now go out alone. But do you go out, also, separately, and listen to the talk of all the people concerning

the stolen jewels. Two of you must talk to the servants at the Pegu Club, and two of you loaf about the barracks, where there are about a hundred white soldiers. The servants at the club will talk about their sahibs, if properly asked, and will brag about their powers—so at the barracks. I would be very glad to hear talk of some mighty hunter! A sahib who slays elephants, who hunts the tiger alone and in the daytime! Such a man, if you hear of one, will be of help to me—so report swiftly if you do so hear, giving the servants, of course, no inkling of your or my interest in mighty hunters. One man stay here, as usual; the rest of you go now."

EVENING had come, with a touch of delicious coolness. The flying foxes passed here and there, and the bats. The moon hung in a sky of velvet amid showers of stars. The ancient scent of the town hinted at mysteries as well as at age.

Bugs walked out. He was carefully dressed in white evening clothes. His objective was the police station, and there Murray, the superintendent, greeted him with an appearance of relief.

"Glad you showed up, Bugs. The governor particularly requested me to keep my hands off this blasted pagoda jewel mystery—to wait till you asked for help, as you were in full charge. And of course every damned soul in Pegu is asking why the police don't do something. Mysterious business. Must be an inside job, eh?"

"No," said Bugs. "It's an outside job—very much so."

"You don't mean to say you know how it was done?" asked Murray.

"Got a pretty good idea—but never mind that now. Knowing how it was done is a long way from catching the thief. I shall probably need your help and your Sikhs' help before this case is settled. But just now I want you to tell me your impressions of the situation in Pegu—this political unrest. Strikes me, as a secret service man, that this town is a hotbed of rebellion."

"It is," growled Murray, "but that's nothing new. However, this jewel business has made the unrest worse. The rumor has gone around—and that means that every native believes it—that we swiped those blasted jewels—lassoed them from an airplane, or some such rot. They think that we intend to force Christianity upon the people as well as government, after desecrating every pagoda in Burma. This is, of course, all part of the stage setting for this 'Burmese king of Burma' propaganda."

Bugs nodded.

"Yes; what you tell me is true. Heard anything of a reincarnation of Aloompra, or a descendant of his, running around loose?"

Murray shook his head.

"You think they will spring that, if they do revolt?"

"Certainly," answered Bugs. "Aloompra is the one name to conjure with among the Burmese—their national hero. He was a sort of Alexander the Great, you know. Also a man of many loves, who must have left a lot of descendants. But the reincarnation idea will be the one they will use—and I expect this is being whispered, under pledge of secrecy, right now. A national hero mixed with religion and superstition is the best yeast to raise a revolution with, you know."

"Yes," said Murray. "But do you think there is any connection between this jewel job and the bubbling pot of revolution?"

"This country is like a plate of hash," answered Bugs. "Everything is mixed up with everything else—so I try to figure on anything. I will keep in touch with you. So long."

Bugs went away from the police station as puzzled as ever in his life. The entire business *was* like a plate of hash. The mysterious manner of the jewels' taking, which looked so uncanny in Rangoon, was no longer mysterious. The method of the criminal had been simple—as Bugs saw it. But the very

simplicity of that method demanded such a complicated and deeply involved organization, which had left no clue whatever, that Bugs was worried.

He had dressed, intending to go to the club for dinner, but now he decided otherwise, and went back to the godown.

"Murray is so far away from any idea about how the jewels were taken that it makes me almost doubt my own solution," Bugs told himself ruefully. "Neither Murray nor Cameron are fools, and neither of them has thought of what seems to me to be the only possible way the thing was done. I may be mistaken, for, after all, I found no clue on the top of that house. But there could be no other way. And it is a logical fact that after you eliminate the impossible, that which remains, however improbable, must be the solution. I'll go on along these lines, anyway . . . "

At the godown Bugs found that none of his men had returned. The man in the place helped him get a meal. Then Bugs made up carefully again as a Burmese. After this he went out into the night once more.

He walked through unlighted native streets toward what seemed a vast shadow against the velvet sky—the great pagoda—behind which the moon was drifting. As a Burmese of devout religious bent Bugs intended to examine as far as he could the platform of worship which surrounded the pagoda. He felt certain that his theory of the stolen jewels was correct, and hoped to find some clue which had escaped him in the afternoon—some new angle, as it were, upon which he could build up an idea concerning the organization that had undoubtedly assisted the thief.

PEGU was dawdling over its evening meal. The narrow street which Bugs took, going up the hill to the pagoda, was deserted. In dark corners he knew that beggars and thieves abounded, the scum of the city lurked. But he noticed nothing until, at the end of the street, he suddenly heard feeble groaning. He hastened toward the sound, and almost tripped over the body of a man. It was very dark there. Bugs knelt down.

"Who are you? Who did this?" Bugs shouted into the dying ear.

The man groaned, shivered slightly—and was dead. Bugs put his whistle to his lips and blew shrilly. He blew again. In the dark houses, in the corners, in the shadows the assassin might be hiding . . . Bugs blew the whistle, and heard footsteps.

"Here! *Ether jow!*" called Bugs.

Round a corner came the running man, carrying a flashlight. He was a Sikh policeman, none other than Bugs' friend, Ruttan Singh, again.

"Ruttan Singh!"

"Ah, sahib!"

The light showed the dead man. He was an English soldier, a private in uniform. He had been stabbed in several places, evidently taken unawares, with no chance to defend himself.

"So," said Ruttan Singh quietly, "this soldier met one of the beggars of this dishonorable place—not one but many. And they sat on him because, being a tough soldier, he reviled them when they asked for alms, which private soldiers have not to give. I have seen this happen before. I will now, according to routine, call for the police ambulance."

"Do so," said Bugs. "But do you leave me your light that I may look about. Perhaps I may find a knife. Can you find your way to the phone box without the light?"

"Certainly, sahib. Take the light."

And the Sikh stalked off into the dark like some giant stork in a most unusual environment.

Bugs was trembling like a hound on the scent. This dead soldier looked like a startling confirmation of his theory concerning the jewel theft. As Ruttan Singh disappeared, Bugs examined the ground with the flashlight. It was dusty ground; an unclean street. And the uniform of the soldier was covered with dust and grime.

Bugs threw the light on the ground—up the hill away from the body. He felt that many eyes were watching him, that many brains were wondering at this apparition of a Burmese in a gaudy *sarong*, who had talked as a friend with a Sikh policeman, who was thus examining the street with such care and interest.

Up the street. Yes; leading toward the pagoda was a trail in the dust. Ah! Here was blood . . . There! The soldier had fallen there! Blood in the dust at the place where he had been attacked. He had fallen there, then his body had been dragged down the hill some ten or a dozen yards, and left.

"Exactly," mused Bugs. "The murderer heard me coming, and ran. If I had not come he would have dragged the body a long way. In this dark the beggars in the corners and houses could not see the killer. They could hear and they listened, afraid. That murderer had no flashlight. The scum in this street have no more idea who he is than I have—perhaps less." He heard Ruttan Singh returning. "The trail leads toward the pagoda, but in this country one can not get a search warrant to examine relic chambers. However, an examination of the chamber would not help me. I must work from another angle." Bugs walked back to the body. "Ah, Ruttan Singh, here is your light, and thank you. Tell Murray sahib that I will be with him in half an hour—ask him to wait for me."

"*Bot atcha, sahib.*"

Bugs hurried back to the godown.

"There are lots of soldiers, lots of dead men," he mused, "but unless I am entirely on the wrong track that dead soldier up the hill there was the clever thief who got those jewels off the summit of the pagoda! If the officer in command at the barracks says yes to two questions I am going to ask him, I will be certain that the dead man was the man I sought traces of on the top of that old building this afternoon. And if my little men have been unable to find any servants bragging about their master being a mighty hunter, the lack of such boastful servants will be further proof that the dead soldier is the man I seek. For private soldiers do not have servants."

Thinking thus, Bugs reached the godown. As he expected his eleven little men were all there. The Snake-man reported for them all.

"Nay, sahib, we have searched diligently but we have failed to find any servant who has a master who shoots tigers in the daytime, or hunts elephants on foot. No such mighty hunter resides in Pegu."

"All right," answered Bugs. "Do you now run and get me a taxicab. A native taxi will be easiest to find. Have him wait at the end of the street—I will be there as soon as I can change my clothes."

He changed rapidly into a white duck suit, the commonplace garb of the European.

"A priest," he thought. "Must be priests in it—but why? After agreeing that no priest would do such a thing, I am forced to think a priest helped the thief. But why? And what about this revolution, which I can feel coming as a sailor feels a storm? What about this Burmese king of Burma the people are asking for—this reincarnation of Aloompra? That also suggests priestly assistance to the thief. But is there any connection between the theft of the jewels and the Burmese king? Lord, what a mess!"

HE WENT to the taxi, sent the Snake-man back to the godown. Then, instead of driving directly to the police station, he told the driver to go to the government telegraph office.

"The Sikhs, my men and Murray are all right, but I need a fighting man with brains and Yankee ingenuity. Williams is now superintendent of the Thana in Rangoon. He helped me before. I'll get him."

So he wired Williams:

COME TO POLICE HEADQUARTERS IN PEGU. NEED YOU. HURRY.

—BUGS

Williams, an American, was one of the smartest men in the police of India. In one affair, having to do with the ancient Mohammedan sect of the Assassins, Williams had saved Bugs' life, and had been of such help that without him Bugs had failed in that grim adventure.

After sending the telegram Bugs went on to Murray's office, where he dismissed the cab. He found Murray with Captain Hillis, the commander of the soldiers at the barracks.

"Hello," said Murray. "Captain, this is the famous Mr. Sinnat, of whom you have heard, of course."

"Heard, but never had the pleasure of meeting before," answered the captain. "I understand, Mr. Sinnat, that you found the body of my man, Needham."

"I did."

"Murray here says you were engaged upon some investigation of your own and found him just as he died."

"Yes. By the way, Captain, was this Needham a man of not too excellent character but a first class rifle shot?"

"Good lord!" The captain was amazed. "How did you know all that? Been talking to some of the other soldiers?"

"No," said Bugs quietly. "I just figured it out."

Murray was staring at him.

"One of those marvelous deductions of yours, eh? But why are you interested, Bugs? Why concern yourself about a private soldier who has been murdered? It's just another job for us police."

"Well," answered Bugs evasively, "I found the body, you know. And when the captain returns to barracks I want to go with him."

Murray stared at Bugs curiously. He knew that Bugs was not the man to drop an important case for a casual murder. He saw, therefore, that the secret service man in some way connected the dead soldier with the stolen jewels. But he said nothing before the captain.

"Glad to have you come with me," said the captain, who also seemed a bit puzzled.

"Thanks. And oblige me by taking me to the barracks as soon as convenient. By the way, Murray, our good friend the Yank, Williams, will be here from Rangoon as soon as he can make it. He will fly. Ask him to wait here for me, will you? I will be back within an hour or two. If you are ready, let's go, Captain."

In the car, Bugs said to Captain Hillis—

"I suppose that this dead man, Needham, had a pal?"

"Yes, of course—a 'townie.' Comes from the same town at home; boys together, you know. Tibbets is the name, a quiet, very decent little chap. Needham, you know, was a big man, while his pal is the smallest soldier I have under me. Church-goer; dependable sort. Want to see him?"

"That's why I am going to the barracks with you," replied Bugs. "If you don't mind I should like to have a private talk with Tibbets."

"I will arrange the interview for you in my office," said the captain. "But have you any objection to telling me why you are so interested—Murray gave me to understand that you were engaged on another case."

"You might call it professional interest," drawled Bugs. "There are features about Needham's murder that interest me."

"I see," said the captain. "Well, here we are. I'll get hold of Tibbets for you."

Presently Tibbets reported to the captain.

"Tibbets," said the officer. "This gentleman wishes to ask you a few questions about Needham."

The captain went out, leaving Bugs alone with the soldier. The man was obviously greatly disturbed and distressed by the death of his friend—so much so that the considerate Bugs hated the task of inquisitor, even if the inquiry was far more important than Tibbets' emotions.

"Please sit down," said the secret service man. "And please understand that I am asking you these few questions because I am anxious to find out who murdered your friend."

"Yes, Mr. Sinnat," replied the soldier.

"Oh, you know me, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I 'appened to be on guard duty one night when you was 'aving dinner with the commander-in-chief."

"Well, sit down, anyway," said Bugs. "Now, as I understand it, Needham was a remarkable rifle shot."

"He were that, sir."

"But—er—a bit wild in his ways, eh? Liked excitement?"

"He were like that, sir," answered the soldier. "But there weren't no real 'arm in Bill, there weren't. He'd 'ave give you the shirt orf his back, he would, if you'd so much as 'inted you wanted it."

"Good natured, perhaps easily led, eh?" said Bugs.

"That were him, sir. I done my level best for him, sir. He lived back in the same village in Cheshire as I did, and we went to school together. His folks will be fair cut up when they 'ears abart this."

"He drank a bit?"

"It were not so much the drink as 'is love for the 'Devil's Bible,' sir—cards were his vice, sir. Cards and gamblin' of any sort. It wasn't so bad, though, until he got to goin' to them chink places. You see, among us gamblin' ain't so much. None of us 'as much money, and if a bloke loses to a pal tonight—well, he may win it back tomorrow. And no bloke bothers another for gamblin' debts, you see, sir. It's all friendly-like. But that were too tame for poor old Bill, and he got to frequentin' them chink places—one in particular. And that led to worse and worse. If I might be so bold as to hoffer a suggestion, Mr. Sinnat, I suspects that a chink is be'ind Bill's murder."

"Not because Bill owed him money, surely?" said Bugs.

"No. If I thought it were that I could tell you who killed him. No; the chink where Bill went 'as too much sense to kill a man because the man owes him noney—although Bill did owe this Hop Sin. But it were Bill's ways, sir, that brought abart 'is doom. You see, like a lot of us, he figured that them Chinese is a lower race, which of course they is. But while the rest of us just thought that, and went no further, Bill went too far. He got to figurin' that it was a sort of compliment to a Chinese woman if he kissed 'er. And some of them Chinese girls felt the same way. Bill were a big, good lookin' chap. Too hintimate he was, too free with them Chinese women. And so some chink hired a bloke to kill Bill. I don't 'ave to tell you, sir, that you can hire a *dacoit* or some other *budmash* to kill a man for five rupees."

Bugs nodded.

"Then, in your opinion, Bill was killed by a hired thug because he had been too free with some Chinese woman, eh?"

"That's the way of it, sir. And, beggin' your pardon, Mr. Sinnat, but I doubt if even you can find that thug. In the first place the chinks is too clever. Everything will be covered up, sir."

"You may be right," said Bugs thoughtfully. "But we have to try, you know. This Chinese you call Hop Sin, now—where is his place?"

The soldier told him, adding that he felt sure that Hop Sin—an old man and fat—had nothing to do with the murder.

" 'E didn't 'ave no woman of his own, didn't Hop, sir, and he were not hinterested in Bill's hexploits."

"Maybe you are right," said Bugs. "And I am much obliged to you."

WHEN Bugs returned to the police station he found Williams waiting for him.

"You must have got a fast plane, eh?" said Bugs.

"Yes; did the fifty miles in thirty minutes," replied Williams.

"Hump!" said Bugs. "You're not in uniform, sensible man, but you're too darned clean for me. Take off your coat."

Williams grinned and obeyed, then Bugs gravely proceeded to wipe the floor with it. As it was a white duck coat it soon showed how dirty the floor was.

"Murray, your sweepers are, of course, trusties in the jail, but you ought to be ashamed of them, all the same. Look at Williams' coat. And now—the hat!"

Williams, still grinning, handed Bugs

his hat. It was a pith helmet. Bugs put his foot through it.

"Dress again," he ordered.

Williams obeyed, and then Bugs wiped the floor with his own coat, exhibited the result to the amazed Murray, and then put his foot through his own hat.

"But, Bugs—" said Murray.

"Imagination, that's the stuff," said Bugs very gravely. "In this job you need lots of imagination. Look at the Yank, now. Have you enough imagination to make that dirty, disreputable looking fellow, with a busted hat, resemble a chief of police?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Murray. "I see."

"And now—" Bugs put on his own filthy coat—"what do you imagine I am—what would you think I was to look at me, if you did not know me?"

"A drunk who has just had a fight with a cop," Williams put in before Murray could answer.

"Worse than that," said Murray severely.

"Come on, Yank!" exclaimed Bugs. "If I look as bad as Murray says—and that goes for you, too—I will never be suspected of being other than a bum. But wait—here . . . "

And Bugs wiped his fingers on the dirty floor, then smeared them across Williams' cheeks.

"You look fine, now. Do the same for me, will you?"

The American complied. And then they left the office together.

"Sit down on the steps," said Bugs. "Slide here and there—like this. Good! Now the ensemble is correct. Busted hats, dirty coats, dirty pants. We can go anywhere without being suspected of being respectable citizens. And who wants to be respectable, anyhow? Nobody but a prig! Whoopee! Come on, old socks—stagger a bit. Here, take my arm—but don't try to sing; I know that voice of yours! If you forget yourself and sing I'll disown you. I still have some susceptibilities left."

"Murray is puzzled," said Williams. "Says you came here after the governor had told him to keep hands off, to look into that mysterious jewel business; and that you suddenly became interested in the murder of a soldier. He can't imagine you dropping a case that way to bother with another, so he thinks that you think—although he does *not* so think—that the murder and the jewels are related. Murray says such a notion is crazy. He's a bit sore on you, old man."

"Because I sent for you, probably," replied Bugs. "Can't blame him for that. But—this isn't flattery—I need the best man I can get, Williams. This is one hell of a complicated case! . . . Stagger a bit more naturally, you big bum. So! Here we leave Pegu proper, and enter the Chinese quarter, which is also centuries old . . .

"Yes, that dead soldier . . . Well, Williams, he was mixed up with this jewel business. Without him the jewels had never been stolen. But he could not have done the job alone—and that's where I am in the dark. Who helped him? However, his murder and what his pal told me have given me a lead. His body had been dragged down the hill from the pagoda, you know. My arrival there prevented more dragging—the killer had to beat it."

"Got any idea how this Needham did the job?" asked Williams.

"He was a wonderful rifle shot," said Bugs.

"Ah, of course," exclaimed the American. "High powered rifle—silencer, too, probably. Great idea. But it never entered my head, Bugs. By Jove, I could have done it myself at a hundred and fifty yards—at two hundred."

"With a moon right behind the target, bringing it into sharp relief, eh?" said Bugs.

"Of course. But, consider, Bugs, as you have, of course, what his fellow crook would have to do. Pick the jewels up as soon as they fell—after they slid over the golden cone . . . Lord, Bugs, could the pal have been a priest?"

"I have thought so," said Bugs. "But let's not guess. As a couple of drunks we

must get more data, and I think I know where and how to get it."

"Needham had an easy mark," went on Williams. "From the filigree work to the top of the pagoda were two solid gold standards—at least that is the estimate—about a foot long. He had a target, two targets, each a foot long and about three inches wide, and an inch thick. A bullet from such a rifle would cut that gold easier than a sharp ax."

"Ax might do it, but a rifle bullet would make nothing of it," answered Bugs. "No man could get the force into an ax which would be anything like a bullet at one hundred and fifty yards. But let's drop this now."

"Just one more question," said Williams. "There is no doubt that a bullet did the job, but are you sure that Needham pulled the trigger?"

"His murder near the pagoda proves it—to me," answered Bugs. "But when we know a bit more the case will come clean. Facts are what we want."

"The pal just let the gold filigree slide down the roof," Williams said reflectively, "and then picked it up—entire."

"Needham had all the time he wanted," Bugs observed. "Could have fired fifty shots, although such a good man probably needed only two or three. Most likely he used a silencer—but the firecrackers of the Chinese New Year made that needless. All this makes me more certain that the pal was Chinese—after what Tibbets told me."

"And the murderer, too?"

"Probably— But here's Hop Sin's place. Come on in."

HOP SIN met them at the entrance. An old, very fat, bland Chinese, who welcomed them with an air of benevolence. Beaming, Hop asked:

"What you have? Everything got. Scotch whisky. Beer. Japanese—"

"Opium got, eh?" said Bugs, drunkenly. He pulled an English gold piece out of his pocket—a sovereign.

Hop nodded. Williams, lurching heavily against Bugs, said: "Never tried that stuff. What's it like, matey?"

"Better than whisky," answered Bugs.

"Like hell it is—nothing is!" snarled Williams. "No opium for me!" He knew that Bugs had no intention of smoking opium. "Let's get proper drunk."

"All right," Bugs agreed with drunken good nature. "Bring on the Scotch, Hop!"

"Finest collection of murderers and thugs in the world in this den," whispered Williams, when Hop went to fill the order. "Look 'em over, will you!"

Hop brought the whisky himself.

"Good," said Bugs genially. "Say, Hop, we came here tonight to meet a friend. Seen anything of him?"

Hop smiled as one accustomed to the questions of drunken men.

"You tell your fiend name, then I see."

"Sure—" Bugs laughed. "Me stupid, eh? No tellum name. Well, he is a big soldier man—name Billy Needham!"

He stared into Hop's eyes, and even the Oriental could not hide altogether a quiver of his eyes from that keen glance. But it was so slight that had not Bugs been alert, it would have passed unnoticed.

"Oh, I savvy him." There was no quaver in Hop's voice. "No, he no come here yet. Be here by and by, maybe. I tellum you here."

"Thanks, Hop. Yes, tell him when he comes. We'll sit around and wait for him."

Hop bowed and went away. Bugs whispered to Williams:

"Hop's trying to be too clever. Pretends he expects Needham here tonight—when he knows he is dead. I saw the look in his eye when I asked the question, but his pretended ignorance is more illuminating. As if such a man as Hop didn't know at once what most of Pegu already knows. As if there could be a murder committed in Pegu without Hop knowing almost immediately, even if he was not interested in it. But the devil of it is to fasten it on him."

"You don't think Hop did it?" asked Williams.

"No; he is like a man who plants the dynamite and lays the fuse—for another man to fire. But we won't go yet."

They sat and watched the shifting swarm of humanity. Hop had disappeared into the gambling room, from which shrill shouts of Chinese and deeper oaths of white man issued. Near at hand the flotsam and jetsam girls of all the world, from Radcliff Highway to Tokio, from Moscow to Paris, sat at tables and in the curtained "boxes" with men. The air was heavy with a thousand odors—that of opium reaching them occasionally. Suddenly Bugs noticed a big man staring at him furtively from the curtain hanging at the gambling room door—a big man of evil looks, of the mixed racial type one meets with in far Upper Burma. Bugs looked at him with fine dissimulation, then applied himself to his drink.

He got up suddenly from his chair, dropping his glass, which broke on the floor. There was some laughter at the breaking, but Bugs was shouting loudly.

"I'm sick of waiting for that ruddy soldier. Don't believe he intends to pay me the money he borrowed. Hop! Hop! Where's that— Oh, here he comes!"

Hop waddled to the table, frowning slightly. Bugs lurched and swore.

"Sorry I break glass, Hop. I pay—how much? I go now. If that damned soldier comes you tell him that if he don't pay me what he owes me I'll bust him on the jaw. The dirty swine, he told me he would meet me here tonight, and pay me."

"I tell him," said Hop quietly. "You come back here, eh?"

"Sure, I come back—I want my money!" He glanced toward the curtain where the big northern Burmese stood, and saw him turn away indifferently, taking Bugs for a drunken person of no consequence.

"Come on!"

Bugs gripped Williams by the collar and half dragged him from the place, while Williams protested loudly.

"Charming joint," said the American as they turned the corner of the vile street and he straightened up and walked naturally.

"One of the worst places in the world," said Bugs. "But it served my turn this night."

"So I see," said Williams. "Now—except of course for the actions of friend Hop—just what did you see there, and what made you hurry out so suddenly?"

"A big brigand I once caught, named Tsung Tzi. He is out again, after a term at the Andamans. I'm hot on the scent, old man. It will be daylight in two hours. Come on. We must get changed and shaved—for a ceremonious call."

The dawn: first a sudden, cooler breath of scented forests and spice gardens, blended with a slight breath of the Bay of Bengal; then a gorgeousness that came as a sudden flame, the calls of birds and the color of a waking world.

And Bugs and Williams, scrupulously dressed, getting out of their car, walking up to the great pagoda, taking off their shoes and asking, in the name of the government of India, for an audience with the august, the most holy and blessed head priest.

They had to wait for some time, and Bugs chafed. Time was the essence of his further activities, it seemed.

FINALLY a young *pongi* came to say that the priest was ready to receive them. It was likely that the priest had been watching Bugs through some sort of peephole enjoying the opportunity of keeping two government officials waiting, and inwardly blessing the strict law of a government which so scrupulously protects the religions of a conquered race—enjoying himself until he saw that Bugs' impatience was likely to submit the Buddhist to an insult: by Bugs' putting on his shoes and not waiting any longer.

So they were ushered ceremoniously into the presence, and the old priest was worth waiting for. Not that the original Gautama, the Buddha, would have recog-

nized his noble philosophy in the religion to which it has degenerated, but because so many priests have kept their minds on the Blessed One so long that they have come to look like him.

They sat down, and tea was offered them. Bugs presented the compliments of Lord Cameron and explained that he had been sent by his Lordship because of the stolen jewels—that his Lordship was greatly distressed about them; and that he, Bugs, was his Lordship's most trusted friend, while Williams was the head of the police. Could—would his Excellency the priest care to aid them by answering a few questions?

The priest would! And his eagerness and wrath at mention of the theft showed again that, as Bugs had thought, he himself had had nothing to do with the crime.

"Do you—" Bugs went to the point at once—"do you have many students, *pongies* or priests who visit you from far places?" he asked.

"Why, of course," exclaimed the Buddhist. "My pagoda is very famous, very blessed, very holy."

"Among these visitors was there one who left you to return to his home—left you since sunset last evening?" went on Bugs.

The Buddhist was surprised.

"Why, you must know him. Is he your friend?"

Bugs smiled.

"I refer to a thin and elderly priest, an ascetic, a man whose goodness, whose blessedness shows in a handsome countenance!" he said.

The priest stared. Then, in spite of innate politeness, he laughed outright.

"Forgive me, but the one you seek has not been here. You must have heard that a visiting priest went home last night. A good man, an excellent man from Tibet, but not—er—not a thin, ascetic or handsome man. More like a fighter of battles does he look—but still, a devout follower of the Blessed One."

Williams saw that Bugs was so excited that he could hardly sit still.

"This excellent visitor brought credentials from his superior, of course?" said Bugs.

"Oh, yes," replied the priest. "But it is a long and difficult journey from Tibet to Pegu, and many robbers shadow the paths who have no respect for holy men. They even attacked this excellent Hung Chang, but he defended himself and escaped from the bandits, after being slightly wounded. Well it was that Hung Chang is so big and brave and strong, else he had lost his life, and I had been deprived of a visitor of wonderful conversation. So near to death did he come that there were blood stains on his papers when he showed them to me. But he laughed at danger, took my blessing and went home last night—saying that the robbers would not again trouble him."

Bugs was on his feet. His sudden action savored of discourtesy. "Thank you, excellent one," he said. "I will no longer intrude upon you. But I hope to visit you some other time."

"Oh, there is no hurry," answered the priest, disappointed. He had hoped for much talk and information.

"Pardon me, but I think there is," said Bugs grimly. "So I must beg your permission to depart."

"Granted, and my blessing to the Lord Cameron," said the old man a trifle angrily.

Bugs bowed; Williams bowed. Then they hurried out, put on their shoes and started for their car.

Ruttan Singh stood at the corner of the street, having just come on duty. As he saluted Bugs called to him.

"Get in the car," he said. "I will arrange your leaving your post with Murray sahib. The pagoda can take care of itself. I am likely to need fighting men. Get in!"

"*Atcha, sahib!*"

And the big man got into the car.

"Step on it! *Chalow—guldi!*" shouted Bugs to the native police driver.

Three streets farther on Bugs saw another Sikh. He stopped the car, and ordered the policeman to get in.

"Sorry to disorganize Murray's patrol, but I have the authority," he said to

Williams. "*Guldi*, car-*walla*—Hurry!" He turned to Williams. "Simple, isn't it?"

"Very simple," drawled Williams. "It is now as clear as mud on a dark night to me. Very simple!"

"We will stop the car at Hop's place, and then barge right in," said Bugs. "The time for caution has passed."

"There's another Sikh," said Williams, his grin belying his racing heart. "Better get him—you seem to be collecting 'em!"

"Thanks," said Bugs. "I didn't see him— Stop the car."

The car stopped, and Bugs "collected" another Sikh policeman. As they got under way again he leaned forward, took his gun from under his left arm, examined it, twirled the cylinder.

"How's yours?" he asked Williams.

"Mine's an automatic," said the American. Then, "Here's Hop's street. Do we go into that rat hole and arrest Hop?"

"Hop, of course; but also that big brute, Tzung Tzi, I spoke of—you didn't notice him last night."

"Ah!" exclaimed Williams cheerfully. "Me heap savvy now!"

"*Bus carow!*" shouted Bugs to the driver. "*Sabo carow ether*," he added. "The rest of us will get out as quietly as possible. You are the senior, Ruttan Singh. With your men follow Williams sahib and myself to the place of Hop Sin. Then guard the entrances while Williams sahib and myself go in and make certain arrests."

Ruttan Singh saluted, but there was doubt on his face.

"It is permitted to speak, sahib?"

"Speak," said Bugs.

"Then, sahib whom I have known for these many years, I would warn your honor that the dirty nest of Hop Sin is even as a den of snakes. It is not meet that my sahib be bitten; therefore, let me and my men go in there and pull the reptiles out!"

Bugs smiled.

"Thanks, Ruttan Singh, but do you and your men guard the entrances—if so be you know them all—while Williams sahib and I go in."

Ruttan Singh saluted.

"*Salaam, sahib!*"

THE STREET was quiet—night was its time of life—but Bugs knew that questioning, suspicious eyes had seen the car and its occupants, and that the news of the coming of the police would reach Hop's place, as he wished. He wanted the inmates of the place aroused, frightened and scurrying—evil consciences raising fears, none knowing what the police visit meant but every one unnerved because of his crimes. The calmest there would be Hop himself, because he had, strange as it seemed, no police record and would never dream that any one had discovered what Bugs had. Burma is not America—such dens as Hop's are commonplace.

So, while Ruttan Singh, swearing fluently under his breath, did his best to "block the ratholes," without any certain idea how many holes there were, Bugs and Williams entered the den.

The morning sunlight, by contrast, made the place look even meaner than it did by night. And there was no life in it. Stink and sleep. But there were whispers, uncanny murmurings. Inside, a Chinese with opium eyes asked rudely what they wanted. Neither Bugs nor Williams wore any uniform—they were dressed as Europeans of the better class—but that Chinese knew that the visit was official. He knew the Sikhs were outside.

Bugs ignored the question. Then he astounded the Chinese by speaking Mandarin Chinese—and asking with the utmost politeness for the pleasure of a few minutes' conversation with Hop Sin.

"He sleeps, honored sir."

The Chinese became suddenly polite.

"I greatly regret the need of disturbing him," murmured Bugs, "but it is inevitable. Should he be too tired to arise, tell him that I will hasten to his bedside, and there hold talk with him."

Then it seemed that Bugs' quiet voice took wings. For a moment the entire

house hummed with movement. It settled into quiet again. The criminals of the place felt assured. The visitor wanted only to speak with Hop Sin!

But the Chinese with the opium eyes was still hesitant, and Bugs spoke with sharp authority.

"Take me to Hop Sin at once—or bring him here to me immediately!"

Down the stairs from the opium room came footsteps, and an angry Hop Sin who was trying to look pleasant appeared.

"Yes! What is it, gentlemen of the police? This is hardly the hour for visiting," he said.

Bugs ignored the implied rudeness.

"How many people have you in this house!" he asked.

"I am not certain."

"Have them all wakened and brought here to me at once," commanded Bugs.

"Certainly," murmured Hop. "Please show me your warrant."

Inwardly Bugs cursed the law he served. With no specific charge against Hop, Bugs had no legal right for his demand, and Hop knew it. As Bugs had seen it, he had no time to see a magistrate. His quarry might get away—might have gone before this. Bugs looked at Williams and nodded. With a sudden movement Williams lunged against Hop. Before the surprised Chinese could speak, the American had handcuffs on him.

"You are under arrest for murder," said Bugs grimly—then hell broke loose.

There were four entrances to the place. There was a Sikh at each of three, and they were narrow. At the main entrance stood Bugs and Williams. From every direction came thugs and murderers seeking escape—armed men who would fight their way to freedom. Men who knew it was better to take this chance than trust to what Hop might tell—Hop who had something on all of them, and who would undoubtedly turn King's evidence to save his own neck.

They charged down upon Bugs and Williams in a horde, urged by a big, ugly brute whose trade was murder, a brute Bugs wanted—the brigand Tzung Tzi. From behind came shrill screams of frantic women. What morning sunlight could get in there glittered on uplifted knives. The death of two more white police to these who had so many crimes to their credit meant nothing at all—if it paved the way to escape.

Williams' police whistle shrilled, calling the Sikhs. The mob broke into shouts as it charged. A revolver and an automatic roared, echoing against the low ceiling.

Men fell, shrieking. No time to reload. A mêlée in which Bugs and Williams blocked the doorway, fighting with fist and clubbed guns.

Williams went down, blood streaming. Above the uproar came the mountain voice of Tzung Tzi; the high shouting of Hop Sin. Bugs drove at the nearest head. A knife cut the sleeve off his left arm, searing like fire. Williams, as big and strong as a heavyweight boxer, struggled to his feet, throwing his assailants right and left.

Then, from behind Bugs, thundered a war cry—and the three Sikhs were at the thugs, grim contempt in their bearded faces, grimmer death in their fighting arms.

Another knife cut Bugs' face. He smashed at more faces, Williams doing likewise at his side. For a second Bugs stepped back, and with the celerity of years of practise reloaded his gun. Then his deadly shooting began again, and for the first time the Sikhs and the white men no longer merely defended themselves; they attacked.

At this the rabble broke, dived for shelter. Bugs charged through the demoralized mob, careless of what might happen. He had seen Tzung Tzi turn and run through the curtain of the gambling room, and was after him.

The brigand knew the holes and nooks and corners of the place; Bugs did not. From behind any corner, from any place, Tzung Tzi could thrust a knife before Bugs saw him. And the place was full of shadows.

It was his realization of this danger that had caused Bugs to summon the

inhabitants of the den to the front entrance. Better a fight with a mob than a silent knife thrust in the dark. He plunged through the curtain, gun in hand. He never took a greater chance in his life . . .

But the brigand was not there. The room seemed empty. Then Bugs knew that the wily Tzung Tzi did not mean to fight. All he craved was escape. And in that warren of three exits and a thousand hiding places Tzung's chance seemed excellent.

Bugs turned and shouted to Williams.

"Round up the bunch. There is one man here whom I will get. Leave him to me!"

He walked to the center of the room, and stood by a fan-tan outfit. And there where the shafts of sunlight, filled with dancing motes of dust, came through chinks in curtains to meet, as it were, at a common center—there Bugs stood, and made vile faces!

He had done the same sort of thing before, many times. And so had every wizard in Burma. He muttered and swayed his body, he moaned slightly. Then in frenzied Shan dialect he cried:

"Good devil of the Hills of Chin, bring the yellow soul of this damned murderer to me. Yes, to me— Oh, you would eat it, eh? Well, good devil, give me his body only. Nay, I will not eat it!"

He stood silent. He had invoked an awful portent, a terrible and all powerful being of animism. He waited—and the man who lay hidden in that room, his knife ready to kill Bugs if he came close enough, his ready racial superstitions ever lively, gulped once. Tzung Tzi feared no living thing but the wizards of his religion. He gulped ever so slightly, fighting his fears of the supernatural—and he had recognized Bugs, whose name was a terror in the land. That one gulp was enough. Bugs swiftly faced the place whence the slight sound issued; then he fired, apparently straight at Tzung Tzi. He fired three times in quick succession.

"Come out, Tzung Tzi," he said quietly.

And Tzung Tzi came out.

"AND NOW, Hop Sin," Bugs said a few minutes later, "I have heard that you desire to tell me much, in hope of a clemency that I do not promise. Now, O man who would so willingly serve the king, as you glibly phrase it, concerning jewels which until lately adorned the pagoda? Ah, so you did not guess that I came here about the jewels? Strange. I thought that it was your knowledge that I came looking for jewels that made you act so strangely—and made the others of this place act so strangely. Strange! Very strange. It cannot be, Hop Sin, that you have another crime on your conscience—another crime, in addition to this crime of the jewels of the pagoda? Surely, in your quiet and honorable life, you have not committed other crimes?"

Hop Sin, who was very fat and loved life, who was anxious to betray his friends, shivered. He looked at Bugs; he looked at the scowling Tzung Tzi, and the gang whom the Sikhs were chaining together preparatory to marching them to jail.

"The jewels!" demanded Bugs.

"Bedroom," exclaimed Hop Sin.

"Take us there," said Bugs.

Hop Sin led the way. It was an imposing bedroom. In it were numerous safes of various ages. Protesting that he would tell all, and that his ready return of the jewels proved his good intent, Hop opened a safe and produced the magnificent trophy—the most valuable thing ever stolen in Burma.

"I tell all," said Hop Sin.

"Pardon me," said Bugs politely. "But I will tell—you may correct me if I go wrong. Let us see . . . There was a soldier who gambled and got into debt—owing money to Hop Sin, which said Hop Sin knew the soldier would never be able to pay when he allowed the debt. Hop Sin knew that private soldiers have no money, but Hop—a cunning person—felt that this soldier might be made useful some day. When that day came Hop Sin would use the soldier. It came sooner than Hop Sin expected.

"There came to Hop Sin an old companion in crime, one Tzung Tzi, released a year ago from the prison at the Andaman Islands. Up in the hills of Northern Burma this Tzung Tzi had waylaid and robbed a priest of Buddha. This was not the first priest he had robbed, for priests were sometimes good picking and, anyway, Tzung Tzi, a lover of wizards, a good animist, hated the priests. This priest, whom Tzung Tzi robbed, had little. He was a good man who was going to visit the pagoda at Pegu. He had with him papers, credentials from his monastery. These papers got slightly stained with blood when Tzung Tzi killed the priest. Tzung Tzi came to Hop Sin, and showed him the papers.

"Hop Sin, a very clever man, saw a great and wonderful plan. He knew the soldier was a fine shot. And he tells his great plan to Tzung Tzi, who enjoys the thought of it. So, first, Tzung Tzi goes to the pagoda, presents the credentials of the priest he had murdered, and is cordially welcomed as a good and just man. This being done, Hop Sin shows the soldier how he can pay his debts and make a lot of money at the same time—just by doing a little shooting.

"The night of the Chinese New Year is chosen. There will be much noise of firing that night. And the excitement will make it easier for the 'priest' Tzung Tzi to lure all men away from a certain side of the pagoda—the clever Hop calculates concerning the moon—if a circle can be said to have sides. The time is set, the soldier fires—and the standard upholding the filigree with the jewels is shot away. It bounds out, strikes the curve of the great golden dome and slides down—close to where Tzung Tzi waits for it to fall. There is no one near where it falls save Tzung Tzi. He picks it up, and again mingles with those who are watching the Chinese shoot devils in the streets below the pagoda. And the soldier returns to Hop Sin, who gives him some money and promises much more. Then the soldier loses the money back to Hop again, gambling, and goes back to barracks.

"He is a tough soldier, and he comes next night and demands his share of the jewels. Hop Sin pacifies him until he can get a talk with Tzung Tzi. When the soldier comes again Hop tells him that the pretended priest will meet him outside the pagoda, in a certain street, and arrange about the sharing. The unsuspecting soldier keeps the appointment, and is murdered by Tzung Tzi. Then I come into the play—as you have seen, Hop Sin. And it is my duty to tell you that anything you say may be used against you at your trial."

He turned and looked at Williams.

"Simple enough matter, but I got tangled in a preconception. The country is so full of unrest that I got it into my head that the unnamed Burmese king of Burma, who will probably have quite a long time to wait for his coronation, was mixed in the jewel business. It looked absurd, and was. But the idea made my job harder."

Williams wiped some blood from his face.

"Say," he said, "every time you send for me I promise myself that the next time I will bring a machine gun instead of an automatic!"

"Might be an excellent idea!" Bugs grinned.

OF VANITY

By F. R. BUCKLEY

TO the Messer Doctor Eugenio Filippi, at the Sign of the Shorn Sheep at Siena. From L. Caradosso by favor of Bertuccio Bucca the lieutenant of freelances: these;

Good my young sir:

As for your being my son, according to your letter of iiij days before the Feast of the Blessed Innocents, I should doubt it; not having been at Siena (to the best of my present memory) since the year of our Lord God 1528; and then in jail, and the jailer had no daughters. I may be wrong; at seventy-eight a man can not remember every night's lodging; I will

ask Bertuccio Bucca, who was my lieutenant in 1537, and who by good hap cometh to visit me in a few days.

Yea or nay, however—and with regret, because both of thy destitute condition and of my own damnable state of rheumatism—I must refuse thine offer to come here and be physician to my senility. In fifty years as guard captain and such-like to the best families, I have not seen it to be well that old men should live with relatives skilled in the use of drugs.

So that we come untrammeled to the third section of thy letter, wherein is explained how, having cured, as apprentice, diseases which baffled the skill of thy master in physic, thou hast been cast forth from employment and forced to seek lodging on the *iii piano* of a draper's shop; nourishing thy superior brain moreover, I doubt not, on yesterday's bread and water from the well on the corner. It is in this connection that I would try to serve thee; having, to be truthful, some vague recollection of green eyes at Siena, though the year escapes me and they may have been only behind the counter of a shop, or such-like. Old age and idleness breed advice; which if thou railest against because it is given thee in lieu of lodgement and affiliation, consider in the light of these facts: that I am currently asked for counsel by folk who would not let thee bleed their dogs; that at this time I am, as aforesaid, most damnably rheumatical; and that it is nevertheless my purpose to gild (in the language of thy profession) the pill of wisdom with the chroniclings of folly.

(Didst thou not sneer here, and say "Wisdom! From a man that mixeth his metaphors?" If so—and I think I know thee!—read on for thy life.)

Beholding me, then in the sixty-fifth year of my age, captain of the guard to Gian, Duke of Costecaldo, father of his Grace now responsible for my pension; and at the present moment, if my prayers have had their due effect, a most eminent angel in glory everlasting. He died at Venice some two years agone, a more or less ridiculous figure of a man, God rest him, notable chiefly for a vast conceit and a sickly fool wife; but at the time whereof I write he was a bashful bachelor of twenty-five, living mostly on his own nails. Despite which he was healthy; whereas I —to spare you details—was not.

I had demonstrable pains here, and aches there; an occasional itch from the old wound in such a shoulder, a passing lameness from the bullet in such a leg; a headache whenever I took more wine than one could wash a shirt in, and rheumatism if I had to stay more than an hour or two in wet clothes; but what ailed me was none of these; they were symptoms only of that fell malady called Age; for which there is but one remedy—earth upon the chest. There are, however, palliatives; peace, to wit; rest and a contented mind. Which latter my Lord Gian denied me, even as my vigorous habit of mind denied me the former.

("Confuseth his sentences," I hear thee mutter, "and yet proposeth to advise *me!*" But unless thou art come to like stale bread, continue.)

To make the which easier for thee, I now quit the realm of grammar, in which (thou art right) I am not at home, and enter that of politics, where my duke was much occupied. He was the son of that Alessandro who had so much more ambition than vitality as to die at the exact moment when his duchy faced that common alternative of ambition—vast aggrandisement at the expense of neighboring estates, or complete ruin and partition among them, according to the outcomes of diplomacy and battle. Whereof diplomacy, at the time of Gian's succession, threatened a result favorable to Rometia, our natural foes.

There remained, therefore, battle; for which we proceeded to prepare. I remember that I was called to the duke's cabinet from an herbalist's, where I was having my shoulder rubbed; and entered smelling like a compost heap at midsummer. Valdifiore was there, the old fool, the treasurer; and Matteo Velone and Giovanni di Sala, and four or five other councilors, all looking very glum, and his

Grace glummer than any of them. This was the first time I had well observed him; he had been away at school until his father died; and while I had attended his coronation, I had once more found it impossible to see the man through the ermine.

I saluted him, and he smiled at me; a novelty in my experience.

"Good day, Captain," says he. And paused—as if he actually expected me to answer.

God bless him who gave poor soldiers the salute to supplant speech! I saluted until I clanked, and he nodded in acknowledgement.

"Captain," he said, folding his hands on the table and speaking to me reasonably, "doubtless you are aware that our negotiations with Rometia and Bugasto have come to naught."

Out of the corner of my eye, while I saluted again, I perceived the face of old Valdifiore more agonized than I should have believed possible when the question was not one of money.

"Such being the case," went on his Grace, "we come naturally, if reluctantly, to consideration of other means for the protection of the duchy. I regret—"

Aye, and I am sure he was going on to tell me, who was no more than paid to risk my life for him, why he found it necessary to impose the risk; but at this point old Valdifiore's endurance ceased. With a flurry of gray whiskers and a snuffle demanding pardon, he took possession, at this point, of the young duke's ear; whence he emerged—he had almost climbed bodily into it—sole master of the conversation. His Grace, thenceforth, sat at the council table mumchance; looking, methought, somewhat sheepish.

"How many men ready for service?" snapped old Flowery Valley.

"Five hundred and seventy," says I, "or, with the levies, trained during the last trouble, twelve hundred and thirty-two, of which total six hundred and forty are cavalry, but we can hire Guido Falcone the freelance, and probably Matteo Scarlatti, with four hundred of mixed arms, and three guns. Guns of our own ready for the field, seventeen; forty-six barrels of powder; shot for the guns up to culverins, six mule loads, the heavier calibers firing stones."

The figures were not accurate, but they served to disappoint old fox Valdifiore, little though he showed it. I would have said ten thousand horse ere I would have stammered.

"Falcone and Scarlatti are no business of thine," he snarled. "Let the rest be ready to march at an hour's notice. Dismissed."

Now I did not salute; nor did I go away.

"Well?" says Valdifiore, glaring at me.

"Well," says I, "I am awaiting the orders of his Lordship."

At which—I noted it without profit, but I noted it, mark you—Gian's look of sheepishness was somewhat relieved; and as he dismissed me, his eyes were kinder than any duke's eyes ever I had seen theretofore. Or since. Yet I learned nothing. O stupid that I was! Thickhead! Ass! And this very harquebus ball which hurts my lower belly as I write, fired into me because of my ignorance!

I GOT it, to be exact, at the bridge of Pontresina; leading the last of my many charges designed to save Gian's wing of the army—he would always command the right, while my lieutenant took the left, and I the center; and vile badly he managed affairs. I never quite came to a knowledge of his young Lordship's scheme of things; save that it was modeled on the tactics of some ancient negro general named Cannibal, whose system was at all costs to avoid attacking the enemy. Until—I suppose, and unless Gian had misread the book—the foe died of old age. So did not our enemies.

What time his Lordship would hold his column in check, according to this Carthaginian method, down would come the left wing of the Rometians or the Bugastians as the case might be, plain modern

Italian style, belly to earth; hair, blood, teeth, lances and toenails. At which event, it would behoove me to cease what I was doing, turn flank to mine own section of the battle, and ride off to save his Grace from pulverization.

But I outrun my story.

We were, by plan, to have opened warfare by attacking the Rometians; it was Valdifiore's plan in which—since he had stolen the idea and the credit for it from me—I for once concurred; but we did not attack the Rometians. Nay. For, the day after I had been ordered to mobilize my forces, there was a conference between the duke and his council and the freelances Falcone and Scarlatti; following the which his Grace fell incontinently into a rage against old Valdifiore, and dismissed him from the council.

Which caused the waste of a day, while Falcone and Scarlatti assured themselves that their agreements (made with Valdifiore) were not invalidated; so that my Lord Gian had no chance to try his Carthaginian tactics; and hence we fought a woundy good battle to a victorious end.

I will not detail the movements of the fight, beyond saying that we were much aided by a mistake of the Rometian commander. Thinking that Gian would be in command of the center, he launched his whole attack on it, to break through before the wings could close in, and take me and my lieutenant in the rear. But since I was in charge of the center, naturally his charge was stopped and held; so that Falcone on the left wing, and my sergeants under Gian on the right, swung in and enveloped the attackers to a very bloody tune indeed.

Whereafter his young Lordship came to see me in my tent. A Rometian without the grace to die quietly had bitten the heel off my boot; and I was cobbling when his Grace entered.

"Nay, nay," says he, as I made to rise. "Continue, good Luigi. Continue. Not bad for my first battle, eh?"

I was so glad that he had left everything to his sergeants, that I could deny him nothing; indeed, my heart was full, and I poured it forth upon him. Of course, I did not say in just what manner he had distinguished himself; senseless as I was, I had too much sense for that; and so how he did drink in my words! At the conclusion he patted me lovingly on the knee, and fell into a sort of confidential reverie.

"I have taken a fancy to thee, good Caradosso," says he, bemused-like. "And so I will tell thee; I have found my vocation."

He mused again, while I looked at him astonished.

"At the university," says he, "I was little regarded; there were dozens handier with their *hic*, *haec* and *hoc*—though I made some showing when it came to Julius Caesar and the other men of war. Ah. H'm."

He stared at me and twisted his hands together. A nervous fellow that seemed eager to please—he seemed disappointed at my silence.

"Then when I came to the throne," says he, with an angry note in his voice, "here was this Valdifiore—aye, ready to say he knew more than I about the duchy, and to put me down. Well, I put *him* down. Aye. But I have no pleasure in politics."

He got up.

"War is my game," says he triumphantly—as if he, rather than the sergeants, had moved that right wing. "If I can do so much in my first fight, what shall follow? War is truly my vocation. Eh?"

He laid his hand on my shoulder; and it seemed to me he had grown taller and wider since our first meeting at the council table.

"Assist me well, good Luigi," says he, "and thou shalt find thine account in it. I am excellently disposed to thee already. Follow where I lead, and there shall be a future for thee. Good night, my good Caradosso."

Saying which, and leaving me open mouthed behind him, he strode from the tent.

WELL, naturally, at such words from one obviously without experience in matters military, I began to take precautions; I took them—warning sub-officers against too serious regard for Gian his orders and such-like—all during our advance upon the Citta di Policastro; and arrived at that field well assured that our smaller force, disciplined as it was, would conquer the larger but laxer army opposed to us, despite Gian's nominal command.

Ah! Ah! I did not know that he had been reading the classics, and admiring this general Cannibal, who thought each wing of an army should maneuver as a separate unit and harass the enemy instead of attacking him; so that—it was this time our turn to take the initiative—I launched my center against the Bugastians in the serene assurance that my flanks would be protected, and that on my right, my sergeants would keep Gian from the grosser blunders.

The order to engage battle once given, they would certes have done this; but there was none to give that first and vital order, of course, save the commander, my Lord Gian; and he gave it not! Nay, seeing my center and left wings charging forward against superior forces, this young man whose forte was war kept his troops stationary in position "to use for pursuit".

Pursuit, ye gods! It was a miracle he had not his bellyful of pursuit—as the pursued, not as the pursuer. I suppose the Bugastian commander, at sight of such patent and inviting idiocy, must have suspected some trap; at all events, instead of sending his left wing forward to outflank us, what does he do but leave us to plain combat with his right and center, and launch his left at young Gian; a throwing away of God's gifts which nevertheless seemed likely to serve him well enough.

Imprimis, the Bugastian wing was stronger in numbers than our own; *secundo*, it was moving, while Gian's force was standing still; and third (I forget the Latin word) the sub-officers, by their very experience in properly conducted warfare, were the more demoralized by this mad order of things. One sergeant, knowing that a charge could only be met by a charge and thinking (God rest him!) that he must have missed an order, led his troop forward regardless; he was stamped into the earth, of course, but he broke to some extent the shock which must otherwise have hurled back that right wing in hopeless ruin.

As it was, the Bugastian charge, which should have pierced Gian's array and turned to take it again in the rear, merely overthrew the first four ranks and shattered the fifth; coming to rest, its momentum exhausted, face to face with the sixth rank, which proceeded to perform prodigies.

Aye, without that sixth rank all would have been over then and there; it died almost to a man, but it held the enemy until I could take breathing space and fifty men from my own operations and cut across field to the aid of Gian's army. The reenforcement—even counting myself as ten men—was absurdly small; moreover, half a troop of Bugastian cavalry broken likewise loose from the mêlée of the center, followed us, and while we fell on the flank of the left wing, took us painfully and unexpectedly in the rear; but somehow after two hours and vast losses, we prevailed.

Ah me! God knoweth how, and I attempt no explanation. I proceed only with the statement that, after we had cleared up what was possible of the piles of dead and given the wounded some kind of attention and made camp for the night, my Lord Gian sent for me—as I thought, to give thanks for my salvation of him.

He seemed peevish, which I attributed to fright; and he did not thank me. Instead he demanded what kind of discipline had I kept in the army, that a sergeant should advance without orders, thus throwing all his battle plans into disorder. Meaning, mark you, the sergeant who had sacrificed his own life and those of twenty picked men, to save the column from utter destruction!

I was so stunned that I stared at my

Lord openmouthed, without speaking.

"Had he come through alive, I would have hanged him," says Gian, biting his nails and looking at me in a way I did not like. "I am in command, Ser Luigi, and I will have my orders obeyed. I have not studied the art of war from the ancients onward, to have my plans spoiled by clodhoppers that cannot tell A from B. Not while there are ropes to be had."

I was fermenting inwardly, but evidently this was no time to bandy words. Taking off my helmet, both as a gesture of humility and with the object of cooling a brow suddenly very hot, I bowed to his Grace and asked pardon for my own part of the business. I had, it will be remembered, left my own part of the battle and come to his assistance. I begged him to believe that I had not done this, and got beaten over the head with a mace, and lost fourteen of my best men, of malice aforethought. At which—suspecting no sarcasm—he became kinder. He even patted me upon the shoulder.

"It was a dangerous move, Captain," says he, more truthfully than he knew, "but under the circumstances, perhaps necessary. There is no blame to thee—save that, had thy subordinates been taught to obey orders, there would have been no need for such an expedient."

There came from my throat a strangled noise which he took for remorse. He patted me again, rather sternly.

"Let what I say be known," says he. "The next officer or man who shall act against orders hangs. Dismissed. Good night."

SO WE MOVED forward to the plain of Pontresina, and fought another and still bloodier battle with the Bugastians and Rometians in alliance. And—to spare description—Gian so handled his troops as to force not only myself to leave my work and go rescue him, but also to compel Guido Falcone to leave half his troops leaderless, and sacrifice the other half in a series of mad charges against cavalry outnumbering his by five or six to one.

In this fight also, by these expedients and God his Grace, we came off victors, though at such a cost in men and material that farther advance into the enemy's country was out of the question; for which last lamentable condition of affairs, Gian was vehemently blaming me (and I had a ball amid the back muscles, which, though it inconvenienced me little then, was to give trouble later) when Falcone came uninvited into the tent; hairier, bloodier, more naked and more furious, than ever I saw a man in my life.

He was not a pretty man, at the best, this Guido; and now, what with his wounds and his rage, he appeared positively demoniac. It must be remembered that he was no Costecaldian patriot, but a freelance; and that his men were worth money.

"Ah-ha!" says he, spitting out a tooth and seating himself on Gian's table, "The great commander, eh? Well, by God!"

He arose and shoved a bony finger into my Lord's chest; the which deed Gian received with raised eyebrows and an expression of extreme displeasure. Aye. But while nobility hath its uses, it is not to be relied on as a restrainer of wild animals; so that I moved nearer.

Guido Falcone rolled a bloodshot eye at me.

"Stay thou away from this, Caradosso," says he in a voice that seemed to issue from his lower ribs. "My account is with his Grace here, that hath nearly got us both killed."

"Be it remembered that I am in the service of his Lordship," says I, "and that is account—"

"Luigi!" says the duke. "Be silent. I will deal with this man. Sirrah! Leave the presence!"

This, delivered with eyebrows still farther lifted, and a finger flung forth in the direction of the tent flap, was directed at Guido; who burst into a merry laugh and moved not beyond swinging his leg.

"Nay, nay," says he. "Thou knowest me not, young Lordship. I did not come

here merely to go forth again. By no means. No. By thy blundering, I have lost—without counting, but at an estimate—two thousand crowns' worth of man flesh; add for armor and horses another thousand, making three thousand crowns over and above the natural losses contemplated by our agreement. Which thou'lt not pay me, wilt thou? Nay. Such being the case, I am not come for the money."

"It is as well," says Gian, pale with anger, and feeling in his breast for a whistle. "I—"

"Instead," says Guido, getting lazily off the table and pulling forth his sword, "I am come for thy life, good young general; and if thou blow that whistle I'll pin thee to the tent pole. Stand back, Luigi Caradosso!"

"Captain!" snaps Gian, seeing me indisposed to obey. "Stand back! I will deal—"

And he drew his sword.

Well, God knows where, if anywhere, he had been instructed in the use of the sword; in a convent, I should guess, or the like of that. Never have I seen such a pitiful exhibition; he drew it from the scabbard as if the hilt had been red hot; and, holding it halfway up the hilt, began by presenting its point rather to me than to Falcone, by this time crouched in an attitude which confirmed all the stories I had ever heard of him. He was reputed a bad fighter, this same Guido; a nasty, belly cutting, hamstring slicing swordsman at the best of times; and now, very visibly, he was in a mood to do real damage. He had indeed started a cut designed to take out both of my Lord's eyes—his Grace's point being at the time some three feet out of position—when I stepped in front of him. The *rinverso tondo* I took on my shoulder plate; simultaneously driving my left hand into Master Falcone's mouth. With my right, wherefrom I had fortunately lost the steel glove, I drew my sword.

"I have no quarrel with thee, Luigi," says Guido, spitting another tooth.

Behind me, young Gian issued orders of some kind, and plucked at the back of my jerkin. I said nothing, but watched Guido carefully. Which was just as well, considering that, even as he spoke, he was fumbling in his skirts for a dagger.

"If thou'd be reasonable—" says he, dropping his sword point; and was instantly on me with the short arm.

It was a shrewd stab for the neck, and did indeed scratch me; but I had been watching his eyes rather than his weapons, and so I managed to avert it by the necessary finger breadth. Gian, in similar case, would have had his head cut off; reflecting upon which, I placed my foot against Guido's bare belly and thrust him forth from the tent. My obvious next move, after following him into the open, should have been a cut at his head—he knew my style, which is high and impatient of ceilings; but none the less, when I sent in a thrust for the stomach, he parried it as though he had expected naught else. Not only so, but he replied with a lunge that went through the fullness of my right sleeve and in the same instant was all for ripping me up the middle with his dagger.

I bunted him for this; I mean, I drave the top of my head against his nose, purposing to run him through while his eyes watered; to no avail. Either he had experienced that trick before (which, from the circumstance of his being alive, I doubted) or he was a man of great natural genius; for, in the twinkling of an eye, he had his arms around me and was bleeding down my breast plate while he tried to lodge his poniard in my back. It took my knee to break him loose; he was dazed enough not to have kept his feet together; and while yet he staggered, I was able both to knock his dagger from his grasp, and to give him a pretty poke in the right breast muscle.

He was done for, with that; it is a wound that must stiffen, and he knew it; wherefore he devoted the three minutes of agility remaining to him in an earnest attempt to slay me ere his sword arm should fall paralyzed and I should slay him. Aye. And twice—he was so much a swordsman, or rather a fighter—he

nearly had me; once with a thrust that turned into an upward cut at the neck; and once with a tossing of his sword into his left hand, which cost me the top half of an ear.

And then, after he had resumed right handed battle with an arm obviously stiff, he had another trick; yes, when I stepped forward to finish him, he dropped flat on the earth and struck upward at my ribs. It was the last resort of a good man, and missed by no more than an inch; and it was with real regret that I stepped forward and pinned him to the ground.

There was, I noticed, a crowd of his men about the tent; they surveyed me sullenly, but made no move. Had Gian been the slayer—though Guido would certainly have had his blood at the first *passado*—that crowd would have torn his Grace to pieces.

I turned, to find him very pale; his eyes fixed on Guido's last struggles. They seemed not to please him—him whose vocation was war. Ha-ha!

"I—I would speak with thee, Captain," he said in a hoarse voice; and walked hastily back into the tent.

NOW, I must say, he thanked me. If, as was certainly the case, he seemed less grateful than he might have done, I attributed it to his underestimation of Guido's swordsmanship; even as I blamed his silence and reserve on the way home (after our losses, there was no continuing the campaign) on the news that his cousins Ginevra and Mercedes, the daughters of his uncle Paul, had been forced to seek refuge at Costecaldo. I explain that this uncle had volunteered to protect our flank against the Bugastians, and had done so at the cost of his life and his castle; a welcome service but one which threw on Gian, as aforesaid, the care of two women whom (his father and Paul had been unfriends) he had never seen.

Considering that cousins are almost invariably ugly and that these were in addition dowerless; that no woman had lived in the castle since Gian's mother's death twenty years before, and that it would be necessary to remodel apartments and pay servants out of a treasury that could not even afford guns to replace those lost, I thought my young Lord's mood quite explicable. And his continued bruskness after we had arrived, I accounted for by his passion for his cousin Ginevra. There are few that can at the same time be courteous to a young woman, and to an old man.

Not that I blamed him; any more than I understood him, alas! Nay, if ever here was a woman that might excuse man's impoliteness to man, sure Ginevra was that woman; according to my taste at least; and, it seemed, according to young Gian's also. I will not describe her, partly because I lack the words; I will merely say that she was the only circumstance that ever made Luigi Caradosso wish he had been young and noble. She was beautiful, yes; but that was not all; nay, by no means. It was visible that had she been a man, she would have been a great man; and that, being a woman, she still had more of the qualities of greatness than most of the nobler sex.

For example, we returned to the castle expecting to find it the dreary barracks we had left, made the more cheerless by the presence of two women in exile. We found it in fact swept, garnished, and transformed into a paradise for weary soldiers; in the intervals of which work my lady had nursed and physicked her sister Mercedes; who, always ailing, might have given sole occupation to an ordinary mortal.

But as I say, Ginevra was not ordinary; nor—it seems to me even now—mortal in the ordinary sense. She liked me; and when she could be spared from walking on the battlements hand in hand with his Lordship, we had many a talk together—about the war, and its prospects for the future; I marveling at her clear knowledge of the possibilities, both military and politic.

These were matters I should have liked to discuss with my Lord Gian; and had no chance. Nay, there was no more of

his patting me on the shoulder and promising to care for my future. His Grace seemed more interested in my lieutenant, the jackanapes that had commanded the left wing. I took liberty to speak of this to Ginevra, who told me that perchance it was because both Gian and the lieutenant were young; and—I doubt not—spoke to his Lordship so that for the first time in weeks I, and not my lieutenant, headed the guard about the dinner table the next night. The Count Ugo Grimaldi was visiting; there was some talk of an alliance.

They were at the salad when old Ugo noticed me.

"Well, by God's hooks!" says he, laying down his plate and staring at me. "Luigi Caradosso! Come hither, old dog!"

Naturally, I could not move without orders, which Gian failed to give; so, having been a soldier himself—it was he that cut my little finger off outside Mantua in '28—the count arose and came to me. Aye, and he shook my hand, and struck me upon the backplate until I rang, and my Pontresina wound, seemingly healed, ached again.

"So 'twas thou," says he in his bull's voice, "that commanded the center and pulled his Grace here out of the mire. Ah-ah! I had heard who made the mistakes, but not who saved the day. Thus doth blame travel faster than credit, even such a short distance as to Venice. Well, well!"

Returning to his seat, he thumped Gian on the back.

"Wise youth!" says he, winking. "I think the more of thee. Caradosso will see thee through. If he is captain, I think perhaps we may sign the treaty. Yes. Now concerning—"

After the which, you may imagine that I was not surprised to be summoned, next morning, to his Lordship's cabinet; and may believe that I was stunned when, instead of receiving the raise in pay which I had expected, I was ordered to take a troop and go forth into the countryside recruiting. For a moment I stared at his Lordship, who stared displeasurably back at me; and then—the first and last time ever I did such a thing—I ventured to point out that I had a lieutenant, and that recruiting—especially in the rainy season—was rather his business than mine.

For a moment, Gian said nothing, though his brows contracted.

"Is the Captain deaf?" he inquired at last.

"Nay, Sire."

"He has, then, heard the order?"

"Aye, Sire," says I, "but—"

"Then will he obey it?" asks Gian, reaching for his bell in case my answer should be in the negative. Yes, I am persuaded that had I refused—had I even argued or protested any further, he would have rung for my lieutenant to arrest me. Me, that had pulled him out of two fatal battles; his savior from Guido Falcone, who would certes have cut him into cat's meat; and his only hope of a treaty with Ugo Grimaldi.

HERE, I thought as I rode out through the rain toward a countryside whose inhabitants would certainly throw stones at us, was gratitude. I had indeed a strong belief that the strain of campaigning, and of his narrow escapes, must have turned the young duke's brain. What else but madness (I asked myself during the following week, while my rheumatism grew worse and worse, and the peasants proved contumacious beyond belief) could explain his treatment of me; a treatment growing more and more ill with the magnitude of my services to him.

I rehearsed his friendliness ere yet I had drawn sword; his coolness after the second battle, and his reserve after the third; his grim silence after I had killed Guido Falcone, and this last amazing insult after I had been recognized by Old Ugo.

I pondered the matter at night, without enlightenment; and was only saved from a puzzlement that might have led to the madhouse, by a peasant that told me I was rather headed for the grave. We were about to hang him for rolling down

rocks on us; and as he stood beneath the trees with a rope around his neck, he mocked us in the name of Carlo Sforza.

"He is at Costecaldo by now!" shouts the fellow, who seemed, like many of his class, a little mad. "The duke will wed Madonna Ginevra, will he?"

"Hoist away," says I to the soldiers, as though paying little attention to his ravings; but I walked back to my tent thoughtful for all that.

This Carlo Sforza was a dangerous man, if for his name only; a small landholder to the south of us, and friendly to Rometia and Bugasto—I remembered this suddenly—because of some argument with my Lord Paul about dower lands. How if this dower claim were vested in Ginevra? How if my lord were on the point of marriage—he had seemed that way inclined when I left—and how if Carlo should think this to presage a revival of the claim? How if, his own freshmen heading the still formidable forces of Rometia and Bugasto, he should indeed be in the act of forestalling the marriage by battle; our forces being weakened as they were, and myself where I could do no good?

I reflected, in a light sweat, that peasants had a way of knowing news earlier than those set in authority over them; also that the rain showed no sign of ceasing to fall upon us, nor the rocks neither, and that my rheumatism and bruises were both very evil, with no more than twenty lousy recruits to show for a fortnight's work; and, at three in the morning, I gave boot and saddle and returned full gallop to Costecaldo.

We were just in time.

Sforza, with a rude army, organized in three columns the better to escape observation, was advancing from the north, south, and east; he was no more than half a day from the castle when we got there; and indeed we had to fight an advanced patrol before we could enter the castle; a full company it was, but—luckily for us—unbroken to the little tricks of warfare.

And having entered, how we did find ourselves besieged! And that was but a foretaste. Where Sforza had got the men, I know not; he must have taken every lad from every ploughtail in his country; and the money to arm them probably from Venice, in anticipation of his claim. With the Bugastians and Rometians and three new pieces of devilish long nosed artillery, in any case, he made a brave showing; which, by next daylight, we found generously spread about us, in the proper form and manner of a siege.

What capped my horror was that his Lordship Gian, faced even with such a grave condition, continued himself in command; consulted, if with any one, then with my lieutenant. For me he sent but once during the first day of the investment; to ask how much food and gunpowder we had in store. It gave me some pleasure to tell him we had but for a week or eight days; and much dismay to see how lightly he took the news.

Yea; as he dismissed me, I perceived that he did not think the siege could last a week; and before the next day was out, I perceived why.

Acting on the precedent of this Cannibal, or some other general that had fought with slingstones; confirmed in his madness no doubt by my lieutenant, a hot headed fool of the worst, my lord had it in mind to sally forth and, with the greatest simplicity, drive Sforza away! It was a project the Church should have condemned as suicide; and suicide it would have been had not I (in command, so please you, neither of the right, left, nor center, but of a miserable handful of reserves) turned the Bugastian flank, without orders, at the last moment; and—Gian having been wounded by a pikeman—taken command of the remnants of our men. Pitiful remnants they were, too; most of them wounded, and all of them boiling with rage against his young Lordship. But I got them back into the castle; and by dint of stabbing some three or four and speaking uncomfortably to the others, induced them to resume their posts and their duties on the walls.

Going to report the which feat to his Lordship, I met Madonna Ginevra, coming out of the room where he lay wounded. She had her hands full of stained linen, and said that I might not see his Grace.

"Unless he is at death's door, I had better, my lady," says I. "We are in bad case."

She surveyed me with much trouble in her eyes.

"He—he hath no more than a hand's breadth of pike in his left leg," says she, evidently thinking of what weight of metal her father and his men had accommodated before taking to their beds, "but—I think you will get little useful counsel from him, Captain. He—he is not used to wounds."

AYE, there we were; not used to wounds—any more than he was used to politics, or the ordering of battles, or the disposition of sieges: a young uselessness. And rude to them that supplied his defects. Some reflection of which cogitation having doubtless appeared in my face, Ginevra seized me by the arm.

"O Caradosso," says she, in a voice which thrilled me down to my very heels, "I reproach myself. It is the report of my marriage to his Lordship hath brought this trouble upon us."

"A true report?" I asked.

"Aye," says she, "but—but we had no thought of this dowry business. I wished but to make him happy. He loves me, Luigi."

There was no need to ask whether she loved him; no, the answer was visible in the way she held her head.

Dissembling my impatience with the which, I replied that I only hoped the proposed alliance might come to pass; doubting this, because it postulated a successful standing of the siege.

"Which how we shall encompass," says I with some irritation, "the devil alone knoweth; since we have no provisions, and the men will not obey his Lordship."

"They will obey thee," says Ginevra coaxingly.

"To a point," says I; "but to say truth, his Grace hath weakened my hands. By dint of calling me away from my own business to attend to his, and treating me ungraciously thereafter—"

By the gesture she now made, I perceived that she was acquainted with the story of Gian his tactics. She was aware of his devotion to Cannibal; she knew about those charges. Aye, aye. And still she loved him. Well, well.

"Sure, sure," says she, before I could damn her darling further, "but thou'lt do thy possible, Captain, wilt thou not?"

"I have always done that," says I; and left her. I doubt she thought I was brusk. Well, I had one comfort; if she thought me rude, the men thought me ruder, and with better reason; yet despite all I could do, they moved slowly to their duties, and were inclined already to grumble publicly about their rations. Added to which—for very lack of numbers I must go carefully with my stabbings.

Did I say we were under a heavy bombardment all this time? Nay; but we were; a damned nasty accurate fire by guns that outranged ours. Whereof the bombs, so long as the gunners tried to drop them into the courtyard, did little damage; but on the second day this Sforza unleashed the nastiness of his mind, and directed a fire of solid balls at the roofs of the towers and such-like; so that the men under cover from the front found themselves under a rain of tiles, stone armorial bearings, cherubs' heads and lead gutter piping.

By the morning of the third day, we had forty-eight casualties, all serious; and now the towers, divested of their mere vanities, were beginning to shower down coping stones. Another twenty-four hours would mean mutiny; and mutiny would mean massacre; and so I told Ginevra. Her sister had grown worse under gunfire, the ladies' wing being somewhat exposed; so she had been removed, of necessity, to a room in Gian's suite.

"This is no time for modesty, and they comfort one another," says my lady, standing wanly before me with bandages in one hand and a composing draft in the other. "What's this about mutiny, Captain?"

"It was for his Grace's ear," says I.

"He is feverish today, and can not be disturbed. He—"

"Very well," says I, flapping my arms hopelessly and turning to go.

She put down the medicaments.

"Stop."

She considered.

"If the men are chafing at the bombardment," says she thoughtfully, "they might have taste for a sortie."

"Ha!" I laughed at that. "After their experience with my Lord three days agone! Lady, they would tear me to pieces. Besides—"

"Yes," says she, "but this would be different. Would they tear *me* to pieces, Captain?"

This surpassed me.

She seemed to take a decision.

"Sforza's food carts are on his extreme right, are they not?" she asked; and seeing that I did not know—I had been too busy keeping my men on the battlements, to care much about the enemy's dispositions—she told me that they were; behind the battery which had been annoying us. Which struck me as interesting, but useless; when I prepared to remark upon the which, she silenced me. Her eyes were large, very bright and, so to speak, insensitive to outside things.

"Have the men mustered in the small courtyard at dusk," says she, picking up the linen and the potion again. "The courtyard by the stables, I mean. They will be in less danger from falling stones. All but a skeleton guard on the walls."

"But, my lady—"

"Do as I say," she blazed at me; and, with pains and apprehension, I did so.

O but the men were on the edge of revolt!

"If young Gian's to address us from his window," says an old sergeant (his Lordship's window indeed gave on the small courtyard) "he'll do so at his peril. As for me—"

He made a vulgar noise, for which I knocked him down; but what use? There were men everywhere—behind me, on each side, and above on the battlements; and they repeated his imitation, and made gestures at their daggers besides. So that I deemed it advisable to say no more, but to retire to my quarters until dusk; leaving my lieutenant meantime in command.

WHO, at four of the afternoon, went without my permission to his Grace's sick room and, forcing his way past Ginevra, laid before his Lordship the men's demand that the castle surrender forthwith. He had presented the demand when I arrived—a corporal had warned me. The men, gathered in the court below, were growling like savage dogs. In one great chair sat Ginevra's sister, white to the lips and trembling; in another, Gian, woundy pale and with one leg raised on two stools. Most evidently, he was frightened; yet not so much so as the lieutenant, to whom he was addressing himself as a father might address a beloved child.

"Jacopo," says my lord, "this is unworthy my men. It is unworthy of thee, Jacopo. It—"

"They threaten to rise and murder us all," says my miserable sub-officer, trembling at the knees. "O Sire—"

Gian extended a hand.

"My son," says he, with a great effort keeping his voice from trembling (the lady Mercedes had flung herself howling at his knees, and he had the other arm about her shoulders) "let it be considered—"

It was now (the men in the courtyard having given a roar subversive of discipline) that my passions overcame me. Interrupting his Lordship for the moment, I stepped forward, smote Jacopo upon the mouth so that he fell unconscious and, seizing him by the middle, threw him out of the window into the midst of his fellow grumblers.

"There!" I shouted at them, while behind me Gian babbled words of high displeasure. "And if any more of ye want the same, I'll award it until I drop. Up, ye mangy coward dogs! Come kill your captain!"

Which invitation they were on their willing way to accept when another voice addressed them; from the mounting block at the northeasterly corner of the small courtyard, to be exact; the voice of my lady Ginevra.

"Hold, men!" says she; and was heard above the hubbub. "Listen to me!"

Well, I have said she was a remarkable woman; I have also said, or at least I have indicated, that her audience was little better than a pack of ravening wolves; ravening, as wolves do not, against their own leaders, of whom they had intimidated two (Gian would have granted their demands in a little) and threatened death to the third. For this new upstart—and a woman at that!—I saw bloody moments not long delayed; and fell, rather than ran, down the stairway into the courtyard with sword drawn and a pistolet in the other hand. Bad policy, as I saw a moment later. The yardful surged at me; but once more Ginevra's voice held them back.

"Listen!" she cried. "Listen!"

Whereupon, in a voice that might have lured birds out of a tree, and at a speed of talking which gave no man space wherein to interrupt, she proposed unto those mutineers the following plan. I have described the men, and their state of mind; likewise I have detailed the experiences which had brought them to that pass. So now I state the Lady Ginevra's scheme without comment. It was simply this; that the battered remnant of garrison there assembled (weaker, of course, in numbers than it had been at the time of Gian's sortie) should sally forth once more against the enemy; make a frontal assault on his battery and passing through this and the infantry which should at once rush to its assistance, raid his food wagons and return with the plunder. That was all.

"But—" says the sergeant that had made the vulgar noise. His mouth had fallen open, and I stepped forward to close it, and invalidate his objection, with my gantlet.

"Yes?" says Ginevra, laying a hand on my shoulder. "What is it, Sergeant?"

He looked at her sheepishly, and pulled his forelock. Aye, he almost grinned.

"Nay, your Ladyship. I but thought—"

"That it would be dangerous?"

Some one in the crowd laughed. Dangerous was a word! The sergeant's grin grew broader.

"Oh, as for that, your Ladyship," says he as she smiled down at him, "I've been through worse."

A lie, of course. She had smiled it out of him. Now, still smiling, she asked—

"Well, then?"

"Well," says the old fellow, looking for a moment at his boots and shaking his head. But he must look up again; and the moment he did so, he was lost. Aye, lost to the extent of snatching off his salad and dashing it on the flagstones so that it was ruinously dented; and shouting, "But aye, since your Ladyship asks me, curse me, but I'll go!"

In the which, not reluctantly, but with roars of laughter and cheering and shouting (one would have thought the whole garrison merry drunk) his fellows agreed; and at a little before dusk, there they were, armed to the teeth, very grim looking, and ready to burst out of the northeasterly sally gate. At which moment Ginevra appeared again; armed, if it may be believed, with a sword and dagger; and more or less dressed in plate. She had a helmet and a breastplate, and a pair of steel gloves; not to mention an expression of face that went woundy well with them.

"Ready?" she demanded of me, making to take position at my side.

"My lady—" says I; at which she waved a hand at me in a way meaning, imperiously, silence.

From above—the window of the sick room which, as I have said, gave on the court—the voice of Gian rose quaveringly,

saying various things of a restraining nature. Yes, Gian was there, in his chamber robe, and the garrison howled at him. Indeed, his appearance might have turned their attention ruinously to other things, had not Ginevra, with a gay wave of her arm at him, of a sudden rushed to the sally port, unbolted it and, as two fellows lent their shoulders to its opening, dashed through and toward the enemy.

Naturally, there was naught to do but follow her; which I did with terror in my heart, and the men with yells of admiration. I caught the girl, and shoved her behind me (for all the good that might do) just as the surprised gunners of the battery got their portfires lighted; the remainder of the contingent charged madly on at the muzzles of the guns. And what fortune they had, and what ill luck I. It will be remembered that the cannon had been so laid as to knock stones off the turret roofs, and relaying pieces, in those days, was not the matter of a moment; whereby it happened that the battery's first fire missed the infantry complete, while sending one light ball to knock my steel helmet over my eyes. And when, stunned and blinded like a cat with its head in a bottle, I had freed myself of this encumbrance, behold Ginevra who had escaped me, flourishing her sword in the midst of the conflict two hundred yards away!

YES, that was a pretty business. The gunners, (God rest them) gave us little enough trouble; the guards of the food wagons proved likewise to be reasonable; but the Sforza infantry, which had caught us on the way back, was quite otherwise; and I with no helmet, and sack of flour under one arm, and Ginevra to look after with the other?

She did her best, I will admit it, to assist me; once pinking a lieutenant very neatly through the leg while I was engaged with a common soldier on my other hand; but had she not been present, I should have had an easier time. A woman on the field of battle is a sight unusual enough; then again most of the Sforza men knew who she was, and desired to capture her; and altogether she was to me much as a sign to an inn, attracting all the thirstiest—I mean blood thirstiest—ruffians to me.

And of my men, each had his hands full, and more also, so that I wit not now how I came through as well as I did. Certainly the sack of flour helped me; for,a rogue having slit it, instead of me, up the middle, I kept it at my feet, taking handfuls from it whenever I got a chance to stoop, and throwing flour in the eyes of such as I could not run through the belly by any other means.

Aye; but we were not there for amusement; we had to get back to the castle; and another company of infantry, backed by a squadron or so of horse, was visibly on the way to our destruction. Seeing which, I slashed my current opponent across the face, picked up Ginevra under that arm which had held the flour sack and, calling to my men to do likewise galloped incontinently for the sally port. This was my running away, of which I heard not the last for many years; the rumor not stating how I threw Ginevra within, and made my men pass into the castle before me; standing alone to face the cavalry charge whereof the lance points thudded into the door one heart beat after I had slammed it behind me.

Ah!

Well, we had lost men; but on the other hand we had gained food—enough for three weeks—to which length Gian proposed that we should now prolong the siege. We entered his chamber, Ginevra and I, to find him with both arms about Mercedes; she had her head on his shoulder and her fingers in her ears, and he was adjuring her to be brave; being so busy with this business that he found no time to thank Ginevra. Indeed, while he was giving me instructions as to the carrying on of the defense, he scarce looked at her.

"Under favor," says I, "we may have food for some time, but whether the men have spirit for it is another matter."

"They have just shown enough," says

he; and, laying Mercedes gently back in her chair, went to the window with the obvious intent of exhorting them to further efforts.

Alas, what a noise arose to greet him! Catcalls; that vulgar sound of the sergeant's in a dozen variations and keys; and roars for the Lady Ginevra. Gian tottered back to his chair white to the lips—it seemed to me, with fury; but Ginevra thought he was faint, and I went out of the room while she ministered unto him. There was a woman!

She joined me in the corridor ten minutes later, and asked me, again, if I was ready.

"For another battle?" says I, wishing she would spend some of her nursing care on my forehead, which I had torn a-getting myself out of my morion, and which ached damnably.

"Nay, for a peace," says she. "Look you, Caradosso. Sforza knows now that we have food, and can defy him longer; he hath not had time to reckon how much, nor to discount the prowess of our men. Now is the time to seek him with proposals for a truce. If I offer him half of the disputed lands, be assured he will accept."

"But—" says I.

"No buts," she returned. "Now is the time. We go together, with one man to carry the white flag. That sergeant."

Aye, and she had the flag, too—made out of an old halberd shaft and a strip of linen; and we went forth together without Gian's knowledge, and she kissed Sforza as a cousin, and reproached him for his militance until he blushed; and would not let him send for his councilors, and told him lies and flattered him, and offered him a quarter of the dower lands instead of the half, and squeezed out his signature to a treaty which obliged him to withdraw his troops from the borders of Costecaldo within two days, under a penalty of twenty thousand crowns. Aye. It was pitiful to see the poor man; how he hesitated between his two names; and how, having handed over the document, he reached for it again; but she had it in her bosom, and demanded of him if this was chivalry. Aye.

And so that was the end of the siege.

BUT of my wound, which I received at Pontresina, and of which I have said so little because it seemed to heal quickly, this was but the beginning; some Sforzan oaf had stuck a dagger into the hole where the bullet still lay, and a fever ensued. And when, three weeks later, I ceased fighting my man nurses and became conscious, it was to find the duchy once more involved in war. Aye. Because Rometia and Bugasto had not been satisfied by this peace which benefited Sforza only. They had lent their troops on the understanding that Costecaldo, under this new general, should be humbled to the dust; and when he retired, this object unaccomplished, they had taken back their troops and repudiated the treaty.

According to Ginevra, who informed me of these matters, they were preparing to march against us again, from two directions, instead of one as before; a thought which made me exceeding weary. The fever had dragged me down. My bones ached; my hair had fallen out; my face, as reflected in my cuirass, was the face of an old man; and moreover, for the first time in my life, I thought it would be better to sit in a vine covered cottage (such as the one I occupy at this writing) than to go fighting. But cottages demand pensions; and no pension had I; nor, meseemed, any chance of one. I had saved Gian's army, his duchy, and his life, getting more deeply into his disfavor at each effort; I saw nothing more that I could do.

"Well," says I drearily, "it will delay the wedding, my lady."

"What wedding?"

"Why, his Grace's with your Ladyship. But—"

Ginevra laughed at me.

"Oh, as for that," says she, "fret not thyself, good Caradosso. There's to be none."

"No wedding?"

"At least not with me. My lord is to marry my sister."

I stared at her.

"Madonna Mercedes?"

She nodded.

"But—" says I.

She laughed again.

"Aye," she said, rising from where she had been sitting friendly-wise, on the foot of my bed. "Look you, Luigi; I think that steel helmet and breast plate may not have become me. Or perhaps I lost dignity being carried out of action under thy arm. I speak frankly, as one soldier to another; for since that business, certes his Grace regards me as little more than a sergeant. I am leaving here tomorrow, to go to my uncle in the Romagna. Goodby, Captain."

"But—" says I again.

"No more on't," says the girl.

At the door she turned.

"It may be, as Holy Writ hath it, more blessed to give than to receive," says she, "but, having given all I could, I have not found it so. Nor thou, from what they tell me. Well—goodby, Luigi."

And she went; and for two days—she left the castle that very afternoon, and I saw her no more—I lay there, a sergeant meanwhile rubbing me with oils, thinking of her and, more especially, of her last words. At the end of which time I arose, tottering upon my legs, and resumed duty.

But Gian was not glad to see me; nor was Mercedes, who so shrank from my appearance that his Grace must put his arm about her, and make dove-like noises into her ear; nor was my lieutenant who, at the time of my appearance was busy saying "Aye" to every movement of my lord's finger on a map.

"Thou'rt in no condition to take the field," says Gian sourly.

"Under favor," says I, "I do indeed feel more ready to be discharged upon a pension—"

No, he would not do that. With what loathing did he regard me!

"But failing that," I went on, "I am still captain, and in command."

"I am in command!" says Gian angrily.

I bowed.

"But it would be better that I should be in some responsible post," says I. "The men are used to me."

Which—remembering how that mob in the courtyard had used the lieutenant for a messenger, and howled at himself—his Lordship well understood. And, after some argument, he gave me the command I asked for. Four companies of levies so fresh from the ploughtail as scarce to know a point from a pommel; and every other horse with the spavin; and his Grace adjured me that I should keep this army to its own business, and refrain from interference with his.

Aye, I laughed when I got back to my quarters; and then I reflected upon the Lady Ginevra and upon those last words of hers and, after two days, I took my ragged detachment and my new theory of worldly success, and followed the arrays of Gian and my lieutenant forth to war. Ha-ha! Gian took the south, and the lieutenant the west. I, with no object specified in orders, roamed at my sweet will.

To be precise, I roamed somewhat ahead and to one flank of Gian's army; so that while the Bugastian main force, apprised that his Grace was still a day's march away, sat down to eat its soup one Wednesday evening, I fell upon it to its great discomfiture; spiked eight of its twelve guns; sent a quarter of its force (recruits, upon whom we wreaked our first onset) bolting back to their homes; and so disorganized the remainder as to reduce its effectiveness by the half.

This done, I drew off under cover of night; and prevented the retreat of the whole army by chopping up its rearward vedettes. Morning should bring Gian within reach of a messenger; and when it dawned, I sent one off to him—my sole remaining sergeant, to whom God had given a long face, and I instructions of the most minute.

And after he had been gone an hour, I descended once more upon those Bugastians.

I HAD THEM (a physician may not understand this, but I state it for mine own honor) in a sort of valley, whose sides were too steep to charge up, but of just the right slope to charge down; I was on three sides of them, the fourth being open in the direction from which Gian must come. They had, as I say, but four guns left; they knew not, to a certainty, either my whereabouts or my numbers. From time to time I would send forth the less clumsy of my horsemen to raid stragglers; always I kept up a galling fire from my half score harquebuses and falconets; and at regular intervals I dispatched the most battered looking of my command with messages to my Lord Gian.

It was when my sergeant returned, with news that his Grace was a bare hour behind him, that I put my grand plan—and my new life theory—to the test. Ordering my trumpeter to sound the signal previously arranged to that end, I launched, from three sides simultaneously, my four hundred men against four thousand of the enemy.

Which sounds deadly for us, and looked it—especially to Gian, whose arrival I greeted with another bugle call, also previously arranged, which caused my forces to draw off from the main conflict, and make as though to re-ascend the slopes down which they had charged. Actually, there was not in those four thousand Bugastians enough spirit or discipline enough for twenty good men; they had missed their soup and had their kettles smashed; they had not slept all night, nor known an instant's peace during that forenoon. I could have had their surrender at any moment; but did I take it?

Nay. Instead I strained my lungs yelling. "No quarter! Butcher all prisoners!" to keep them from this course—until Gian should arrive. Which yelling, I think, more even than the crossbow bolt which caught me in the shoulder as his Grace's troops came over the horizon, was responsible for my fainting in the saddle, and remaining unconscious until long after dusk.

I awoke to find myself in a tent occupied by his Lordship and my lieutenant that should have been twenty miles away, watching the Rometian army. My subordinate was standing before a table and, from what I could see of him with one eye half open, was trembling at the knees; his Grace was seated; and, as my ears presently informed me, his manner was far different from that with which he had soothed this same young man when there had been babblings of surrender, and threats of mutiny, and such like.

"And so thou'st disobeyed orders," Gian was roaring, "and left my westerly border open!"

"Three quarters of the force is there," quavers the lieutenant, "with a most experienced serg— As I say, I thought your Lordship was in danger—"

"Damnation!" shouts his Lordship, rising and thumping the table (he had wished, I remembered, to do likewise with me once or twice, but had not dared) "Hadst thou orders, or not?"

"Seeing that your Grace had been called away by this disaster to Caradosso—"

"Silence!"

I observed my good lord put his hands to his furred lapels and bend a stern gaze on his victim. For the second time—the first having been after that first abortion of a battle—meseemed that his Grace's stature had increased.

"Go back to thy column," says he, "and henceforth remember that I can manage my own affairs—aye, and thine, and Caradosso's if need be. As I have shown this day. Now go and forget not."

As he had shown this day! I waited until the lieutenant had hit himself in the eye saluting, and taken his departure, before I turned the laugh that was torturing me, into a groan, and flung my arms about as though coming to myself.

"Send for his Lordship!" says I feebly. "All is lost! Send for his Grace!"

Gian was at my side in an instant.

"Now, now," says he, putting one hand on my forehead and the other on my shoulder bandage. "Now, now."

"Send for his Grace!" I yelled at the top of my voice, sitting bolt upright; and thus came face to face with him, and looked foolish.

He told me, in a soft voice, that I had had a bad dream; that he was there, and that there was no more need for fear.

I sank back gasping; and he reached for one of my hands and held it.

" 'Send for his Grace,' eh?" says my lord, like a mother to her first born, and smiling. "Ah! His Grace hath then his uses, Luigi *mio*?"

I took the liberty of enclosing his hand with my other, damnably though it hurt my wounded shoulder. Had I had a tear to shed, be sure it should have trickled down my cheek. I dared make no effort, for fear of laughing.

"It was touch and go with thee, my Caradosso," says Gian, patting my knuckles. "Aye; thy dash and fireworks almost had its foreordained result. When thou'rt well again, I'll show thee thy mistakes. It was well indeed that I was handy, and that thou'd sense enough to bow thy pride. Well for thee thou sent for his Grace."

"I am a ruined man," says I, thanking God for the grin concealing obscurity.

He patted me again.

"My Caradosso," says he. "Thou'rt less ruined than ever in thy life; thou knowest now that there are those younger, and more informed and perhaps a little wiser, than thyself. Which if every one knew, instead of setting me at naught, as though I were incapable of business on my own behalf—"

He paused; doubtless brooding upon the usurpations practised by Valdifiore, by Ginevra, and now by my luckless lieutenant.

"—this world," says my Lord, "would be a better place. It is the function of the noble to fend for their dependents; yet ever there are those who would reverse the process and fly in the face of the Almighty."

He stood up. Yea, he had increased in girth as well as in height.

"Leave thy future to me, my Luigi," says he. "It is rightly my affair."

Following which, as I have indicated, he gave me a pension, and retired me from the guard, and established me in this cottage; and all as a reward for ceasing to wear myself out correcting his errors; for letting my brain rest, and permitting him to bludgeon his own against the wall of experience; for abandoning the protection of his life and property and ministering, just once, to his vanity.

Ah-ah, my son—if my son indeed thou art; I perceive from thy letter that thou art a clever fellow. I assume, from the circumstance of thy master's having dismissed thee, that thou wert additionally clever enough to convince him of thy cleverness, healing maladies he could not cure. Thou hast but one more stage to accomplish; the profitable stage, which shall restore thee to a full diet and if God please bring thee to an old age no less prosperous than mine own; which I attained *not* while my virtues were in full function, but after seeing Valdifiore dismissed for his wisdom that made my Lord feel callow; myself disgraced for saving Gian's army but humbling his pride; and above all, Ginevra (whom he loved) jilted for her very courage and wit, and her sister wed for a mewling weakness that made my weak lord feel strong.

Thou must, in a word, convince thy master that, clever as thou art, compared with himself thou art a fool; as I did; as I have here shown. It is ill to be a fool; but it is worse to seem cleverer, braver, or more virtuous than those who have thy fate in their hands. *Vanitas, vanitatum: omnia vanitas.*

And now I have writers' cramp, and Bertuccio Bucca is come, and I am called to supper. I have spoken with him about thee, and he remembers a Sienese visit that I had forgot; so if thy mother hath green eyes, ask her if she hath memory of an orchard behind the monastery near the Piazza del Campo.

And if she say yes, take these as the words and counsel of

Thy ever loving father,

—L. CARADOSSO

THUMBS DOWN

By ARED WHITE

THERE was a note of challenge in Colonel Rand's gray eyes as he motioned his star field operative to a chair beside him in the counter-espionage office at American General Headquarters.

"I presume, Elton," drawled Rand, "that you would consider it very much beneath your dignity to tackle an ordinary front line spy case after all your big coups in Switzerland and Paris. Eh?"

Captain Fox Elton read tension under the espionage chieftain's effort at easy humor. He smiled insinuatingly.

"But, sir," he replied, "if this was an ordinary case, I doubt if the Colonel would have brought me back from Nice by airplane when I'd had only two days of that much promised week's leave."

"Precisely!" The colonel bit out the word. He abandoned his whim of indirection and proceeded straight to business. "There's a lone German spy loose at a critical point in our lines. I'm going to send you out to get him."

"Sounds simple enough, sir," said Elton easily.

Colonel Rand flushed at the subtle impudence. Highly as he regarded Elton's excellent work in trapping the best of the Imperial secret agents, Rand could never accustom himself to that lack in Elton of a fine sense of military courtesy. A whole year in the Service as an emergency officer had failed to impart to Elton a proper respect for that exalted rank of the silver eagle. Secretly the colonel harbored a hope, which he would not have admitted even to himself, that his young assistant might return one day humbled, amenable to fitting rebuke.

"We'll see how simple you find it, Captain," he retorted. "It may sound simple enough—merely a lone spy loose in one of our divisions—but it may interest you to learn that our best corps men, as well as the division G-2, have flunked out on this job. The rascal is safely entrenched, probably in an American officer's berth. Yet every one of the twenty-seven thousand officers and men in the division has been checked by experts—and not a single lead."

"Any documents, sir?"

"You might glance through this one first, Elton. It may stir you into the proper mood for the job."

Rand passed across the desk to Elton an American personnel report blank upon the back of which was typewritten a blustering challenge:

> American G-2: The undersigned very much is enjoying his stay in your division. The efforts of your Intelligence officers to make my acquaintance amuse me. This will let you know that sometime tomorrow, at my convenience, I shall personally visit your division P. C. Until then, *auf Wiedersehen.* —VON GRIER.

Elton studied the wording for several minutes, then took a heavy glass from Rand's desk and searched the markings of the type.

"Since the case has been passed up to us," Rand spoke up, "you are at liberty to take that challenge as directed to yourself, Elton."

"Of course," assented Elton, ignoring the taunt in Rand's tone. He folded the challenge carefully and placed it in his pocketbook. "But it strikes me as a valuable document, aside from all that."

"Yes? Well, it didn't do any one else any good, except to make them hopping mad."

"At least it suggests Von Grier's mental attitude — another blustering Prussian who thinks the Americans a band of dumb oxen. That means he regards his own finesse as infallible, something far over all our heads. His message was written on an American typewriter, probably at a brigade headquarters."

"Why do you conclude that?"

"By the heavy markings made by a dirty typewriter. The Germans take better care of their military property. The fact that the type was unusually dirty points to a brigade typewriter, one used but little by any one."

"You happen to be right on that score, Elton. But don't count upon your deductions too far. Division G-2 thought of that, promptly located the typewriter, and has had every machine in the area under secret surveillance since. But nothing came of it."

"Nevertheless, sir," affirmed Elton, a sparkle of amusement in his blue eyes, "it gives us still another valuable slant on Von Grier's attitude—his obvious belief that our higher command posts are the safest game for his pranks."

"Whether or not you mean that for an impertinence, Elton," Rand rejoined sharply, "I'd suggest you take this assignment with the utmost seriousness. I've a notion you're going to find your hands mighty full when you get up front."

"I agree with you, sir. May I ask what the fellow's specialities are, what mischief he has been up to?"

COLONEL RAND banged his fist down on the table top. "Plenty! If the German army had access to every order and position in that whole division area they couldn't be better informed. They're strafing the vital points to death with their artillery. We place a new ammunition dump and it's shelled the next day. We move a regimental or even a brigade command post and the Boche artillery has its map coordinates for their gunners next day. Even the division commander got rained into a dugout with German shrapnel when he was up front on reconnaissance the other day. The Boche artillery kept him in a fox hole for an hour. The division operations officer says he might just as well put the Boche commanders on the distribution list for all orders — and it's raising Cain with morale."

"Any one seen Von Grier?"

"There's another rub. He's seen almost daily. He's got a mania for going about nights, giving bogus orders. I've been studying all these reports on his activity while waiting for you to get back here from the Mediterranean. One of his pranks was to concentrate fifteen men along the outpost line for instruction in conducting a night raid. While they waited for the unknown American captain from headquarters to put them through their paces, down drops a German box barrage and pinches them off for the benefit of a raid which got all but three of them. The very next night he talked an artillery adjutant out of a situation map, which cost us some valuable guns. That same night he turned the ration train back to the railhead at Toul with his fool orders, and the division had to skip a meal. That's only part of his brash impudence—and the trouble is, no two accounts agree as to what he looks like, how he walks, what his voice sounds like, or what his rank is. One night it's a blond lieutenant from the quartermaster train, next a swarthy captain of field artillery. First he's a young lieutenant, then a middle aged captain. At last appearance he was a major with walrus mustaches and horn rimmed glasses."

"And no one has been able to get a lead on his methods, beyond that?"

"Yes. It must be that one officer was hot on his trail—had him dead to rights—a regimental intelligence officer named Rigdon. The lieutenant was found dead in his dugout, and in the bellows pocket of his coat was a slip of paper. You may read it for yourself."

A strange message, done in block letters on a scrap of paper that apparently had been snatched hastily from a military notebook, met Elton's eyes.

> Sirs: This act was done in self-defense, in line of duty, and, therefore, the fortune of war. Sorry. —VON G.

"There were no signs of violence on Rigdon's body," Colonel Rand explained as Elton studied the missive. "Except for Von Grier's note, Rigdon's death might have passed in the rush of things for heart failure. The battalion doctors held a post-mortem and found it a case of prussic acid poisoning. Von Grier must have planted the poison in a glass of Rigdon's cognac."

"A polite as well as a resourceful jackal," reflected Elton. "Are there any other documents?"

"Only this one. Looks like an ordinary terrain sketch, doesn't it?"

Elton saw a roughly penciled sketch, showing a segment of the division's outpost line together with a route out through the wires into the heart of No Man's Land. It was of the type made by patrol leaders for their own guidance and certainly could have no particular military value to the enemy. It had one characteristic which Elton noted, a number of sharp, zigzagging angles; but he passed these as peculiar to the terrain in the division area. After a brief scrutiny, he tossed the sketch back on to the colonel's desk.

"Doesn't look like anything we could use, sir. How did they conclude that it was connected in any way with Von Grier?"

"No question on that score, Elton. Fact is, I've puzzled a lot over Von Grier's stunt with this sketch. None of us can make heads or tails of it. An officer masquerader—identified too late as our Boche agent—stopped a midnight patrol just as it was leaving out into No Man's Land. Told the sergeant in charge that the colonel of the regiment had directed the patrol to use the sketch in swinging close to the German lines in order to verify a report of a new German outpost ditch. Well, the sergeant fell for it. Result was, his patrol got jumped by a Hun platoon—and the sergeant was the only man to escape. Everybody at the division P. C. as well as at corps has taken a turn at trying to figure the thing out. They've all concluded that it was just a prank of his, to deliver a few American prisoners over. Yet that theory doesn't hold water any too well, as the Germans had fifteen prisoners the night before, which was enough for their intelligence staffs to question. Anyhow they decided it might possibly have a cipher mixed up somewhere in it, which is for G. H. Q. to find out."

Captain Elton recovered the sketch as the colonel spoke. His eyes centered upon it with a new interest. The number of sharp angles now struck him as incongruous. No network of trenches and routes could have so many sharp twists and turns.

"That puts a different light on this little document, sir," he said thoughtfully. "I'm beginning to see some details in this thing that I altogether overlooked in the first place. In fact, sir, I'd like to take the sketch to my billet overnight and see just what I can make out of it."

"Overnight?" echoed Rand. "But division is expecting us to have some one on the job with the least practicable delay. I think you ought to be there by stand-to in the morning."

"Yes, sir, I agree that some one ought to report there at once. I've been rather mulling this case over, from the available facts, and would like to suggest sending those two young graduates of the Military Intelligence School, Dole and Mullins. I'll follow along later."

Colonel Rand glared astonishment.

"I thought you told me they were a couple of dumbbells, Elton!" he roared. "Noisy and clumsy, despite all their training."

"They are all that, sir. Which makes them ideal for this case. You see they'll sort of keep Von Grier entertained until I arrive with Sergeant Walters. Von Grier will be so busy watching them that he may overlook me for a time. In any case I'd like to try it; and if the colonel has nothing further, I'll go into executive session with myself over at my billet."

"Well, do it your own way," Rand agreed. "But remember, we've got to have results on this case, and without letting any grass grow under our feet."

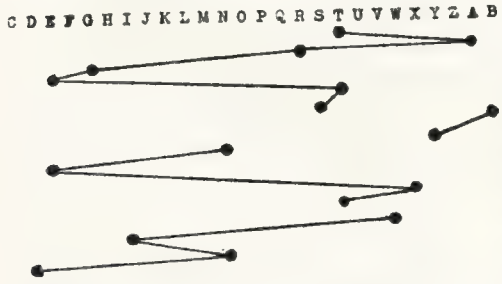
AT HIS BILLET in the environs of the headquarters village, Elton resumed his study of the sketch under a powerful glass. With patient care he ran down and checked the lines in quest of a cipher arrangement. But the markings were too few in number to contain a tangible cipher. However, the grim history of the sketch convinced him that somewhere hidden in the scrap of paper was vital information — a possible cryptogram which the corps and division intelligence sections were not equipped to find.

He heated a flat iron over a spirit lamp and applied it to the surface of the sketch, since heat would develop the commonest of the Prussian secret fluids such as lemon juice or diluted sulphuric acid. This netting him nothing, he immersed the paper in water in quest of a nitric acid ink. Again failure. One test remained. There was a possibility that the audacious Von Grier might carry a vial of acid of lead in solution. He brought from his locker trunk a container of hydrogen sulphide gas and applied it to the paper.

Out of blank nothingness small mottled markings slowly appeared on the sketch under the application of the hydrogen sulphide gas. They multiplied into broken

lines and indistinct dots. Elton saw that the German invisible ink had been so diluted as to leave only a temporary record, but, using his magnifying glass, he was able to line it in with his pencil. The result was clearly a cipher arrangement. A cipher of dots, lines and angles was a new one within his long experience in cryptograms, but he assumed that it must be a simple cipher for emergency use. At the outset he concluded that the dots must indicate, in some way, certain letters of the alphabet, and on that theory wrote down the alphabet and traced a copy of Von Grier's elusive sketch immediately under it.

With his word frequency tables and other data for cipher breaking, Elton set to work. He observed that three of the dots appeared one directly under the other, which suggested one of the commonest letters of the alphabet. He tried, alternately, E, T, O, I and N, letters used more frequently than any others in the construction of words, and finally settled tentatively upon T as the letter intended by Von Grier. Hour after hour, thereafter, he tested the dots and angles, juggling letters back and forth, until he hit upon the German key, an alphabet arrangement set over those dots and angles. The cryptogram, with the broken key now set over it, appeared as follows:



Verification of his handiwork left him without question. He needed only to run his pencil straight upward from each dot to the letter set directly over it. The sequence of letters was fixed by the lines and angles, beginning with the first dot at the upper left of the sketch and proceeding thereafter from left to right in the ordinary arrangement of words on a printed page. Elton brought the letters together and studied the resultant message: T-A-R-G-E-T-S B-Y N-E-X-T W-I-N-D.

The message itself was as cryptic as Von Grier's invisible cipher. It might mean anything. But Elton's attention was drawn from the message to a dim smudge at the bottom of the sketch. His eyes narrowed in disbelief. The smudge unmistakably was the print of a thumb. The Germans had used that form of verification of Von Grier's messages, against the possibility of an Allied trick.

Elton seized the strongest of his magnifying glasses and leveled it upon the telltale print. Von Grier could not have made his capture more certain had he attached his photograph, name and address to the message. Comparison of that print with the fingerprint record of every man in the division would bring the trail promptly and effectually to Von Grier's door. No matter how securely he was entrenched in American uniform, no matter what foundation he had laid back in the United States for his masquerade as an American officer, he could not discount the damning evidence of that dumb print.

But Elton's hopes dropped as swiftly as they had risen when he studied the mark under his strongest glass. The diluted acid of lead had left only a blurred outline. Not even the shape of the thumb was preserved. The invisible ink had faded out so that those intricate markings required for identification of a thumbprint were gone. Elton, with a shrug, placed the sketch in his pocketbook, among his other Von Grier exhibits, slung on his musette bag and went for Sergeant Walters, his trusted assistant in many adventures. Sun-up saw them speeding out of the village in an inconspicuous Army flivver toward the Front.

There was high excitement and burning indignation in the G-2 office of the division P. C. when Elton and Walters reported themselves early in the afternoon. The phantom Von Grier had pulled his most

audacious and humiliating coup during the night. The division G-2 major recounted the details in high dudgeon. One of the brigades had moved its command post shortly before midnight. No sooner was the brigade general and his staff up to check their new dugouts than an officer, trailing them closely, stalked up to the radio corporal and in an authoritative voice ordered him to radio a brief message to the division general.

As the message went on the air, the officer vanished just ahead of a violent outburst of German artillery fire that wrecked the new command post, wounded three of the staff and sent the brigadier scurrying to cover *sans* tin hat and dignity. Investigation disclosed that Von Grier had used this bold coup to put in the air the exact map coordinates of the P. C, thus giving the Boche gunners their data to open fire.

"Catching that weasel Von Grier is the order of the day!" bellowed the intelligence major. "We've pooled donations and raised five thousand francs. The whole pot goes to the man or outfit that traps the infernal rascal. But that's only an incident. We've organized our intelligence police to listen in every dugout, to bring in every suspicion they get wind of. We're turning this into a man hunt on a big scale, and we'll smoke that Boche out, or make it so hot he'll skip into Germany!"

"Your plan sounds excellent, Major," Elton said gravely, though there was amusement deep in his eyes. He lighted a cigaret and sat some time in thought. "Your demonstration may enable us to pick up his trail rather quickly, if I do not mistake Von Grier's temperament."

"What do you mean?" demanded the major.

"Oh, nothing in particular," Elton evaded. "At least nothing so very tangible for the time being."

"Remember this, Captain," said the G-2 major sharply. "In a hunt like this we've got to have coordination. If you get any ideas I want to know them. We're glad to have your help, but you've got to work with us, in harmony with the whole plan. There will be a conference of the division group at four o'clock. We've got a plan to put over then. I'll expect you to sit in and orient yourself to the main effort."

"Excellent," assented Elton. He indulged a quizzical smile. "Your energy convinces me that Von Grier is on mighty thin ice, Major . . . About the two intelligence officers who reported in from G. H. Q. during the night—Dole and Mullins; they are on the job?"

"Very much so." The major lowered his voice. "They've developed a strong lead already, and we're going to use it to bait a trap. I'll not discuss it until the conference, but I'm laying considerable store by what they've found."

"They're out in the area now, I take it?"

"As busy as a brace of pointers in a stubble field."

"Well, they're valuable men, Major, for their purpose. For my own part I'd rather play sort of in the background, if you don't mind. But you may be certain, sir, that I will work in complete harmony with your plan. See you at four."

WITH an hour intervening before the major's intelligence conference, Elton dispatched Sergeant Walters to select and equip a convenient dugout in which to live during their stay in the division area. Elton went to the personnel office, where he pried about among the records of officers, giving special attention to those serving on brigade, regimental and battalion staffs of all arms. These records gave him no leads. There were no recent replacements, none since the division reached France, and none of questionable antecedents or doubtful loyalty. Ten officers of German ancestry already had been relieved and returned to the United States under a general precautionary order. All others were native born Americans, or natives of neutral countries, Americans by citizenship.

The G-2 major's conference of intelli-

gence officers and regimental representatives in the division wide spy hunt was held behind closed doors. Its importance was attested by the fact that the division commander surrendered his own spacious chamber for the purpose. Sentries paraded back and forth outside to prevent the approach of any unauthorized persons. Reports were received, plans projected, suggestions invited from all. Elton sat inconspicuously to one side, only vaguely interested in what was said, concerning himself with a study of persons rather than their plans.

From the gloating Von Grier challenge, from the evidence of the fellow's mental makeup as disclosed by his methods, Elton adopted the conclusion that inevitably Von Grier would seek a way to join in this quest. Not only would such a rôle appeal to the Prussian's ego, but while the hunt was at white heat, his safest refuge would be in running with the hounds. Undoubtedly a rascal of spirit, daring and military ability, Von Grier had been able to entrench himself securely in confidence by the simple method of graduation from an officers' training camp in the United States. Consistent with Prussian espionage methods, it might be that he had spent most of his life in the United States, held citizenship papers, and perhaps could point to years of faithful service. The German secret service had been far seeing in its intrigues.

But no face in the room stood out conspicuously. Of the dozen men present, every one was of clean, clear cut mold, with no hint of treachery or intrigue in eye, voice or manner. They sat, grim faced and alert, listening to what was said by the voluble G-2 major, taking occasional notes, offering meager suggestions. From his scrutiny of them, Elton gradually centered his interest upon three officers. The three were the keenest types present, each of them detailed from a brigade to represent his component in the chase. Captains Chase, Fallon and Boll were of the same general stamp: spare, wiry, finely chiseled of feature, and with cold, efficient military presence. They were the logical kind of men to be selected by their commanders for an important mission requiring energy, discretion and alertness. From the blustering Von Grier challenge, Elton had visioned a possibility of the Prussian sitting in on the plans for his own capture, a superior glint deep in taunting eyes. But not once did his searching eyes fall upon any such telltale omen. All sat with a reserved, polite interest, jotting down fragments of reports, speaking in contained voice. Not even the vague whispering of intuition came to Elton's assistance. If Von Grier was one of these men, then he was perfectly equipped and trained for his dual rôle. So perfectly, Elton admitted, that he must possess that rare espionage trait of adapting mental attitude and personality to his rôle of loyal American officer in hours of danger.

The G-2 major finally parceled out assignments for the night's vigil. Every opening in the wire must be watched in the hope of intercepting the spy or one of his message runners. In making these assignments the major omitted Elton, evidently with the idea of leaving him free. Then, in a low intense voice, the major announced his secret trap for Von Grier. The plan had been suggested, he explained generously, by two intelligence specialists from general headquarters, Lieutenants Dole and Mullins. The major unfolded the details with a high-strung intensity.

Shortly after dark, he would put a dummy message on the private telephone wires connecting division with each of the brigades. The message would confide that important attack orders had just been received from Army headquarters and would be distributed to the brigade generals at stand-to. The chief-of-staff would adroitly let it drop in an aside that he was concealing the orders by leaving them in plain sight in his wire basket, the last place prying eyes would expect to find them. Von Grier would be certain to get wind of the report, perhaps would be listening in on a tapped wire.

He would be equally certain to go after the precious orders, depending upon his American uniform to screen him from capture. All officers of the intelligence detail, therefore, would slip back from their vigil by eleven o'clock, at which hour the chief-of-staff would turn out his lights and retire to his sleeping quarters in an adjoining stone house. They would then lie in wait with a strong patrol for developments.

Elton rose to his feet as the major concluded, an incredulous smile on his lips.

"Surely, sir," he said, "you do not expect Von Grier to step into a trap so simple as all that, do you?"

The major's face turned scarlet at the impertinence.

"Naturally, Captain," he replied coldly, "we have some reasons for expecting results, other than those I have disclosed. The plan is well worth trying. If it fails, at least we have tried something constructive—exhausted another possibility —which is infinitely better than mere fault finding."

"I beg the major's pardon." Elton smiled. "No offense, sir. But if you'll give me a detail to the front line for the earlier evening, I'll feel that I'm using my time here to good purpose."

"Of couse," snapped the major. He consulted his assignment map with ponderous care. "You can take the gap at 246.784. Remain there until 10:30, which will give you time to get back here at 11:00. If there are no questions, that's all, gentlemen."

As the officers were silently dispersing, the G-2 major arrested Elton with a grudging explanation.

"I didn't leave you out on purpose, Captain," he muttered. "Understood you to say you wanted to stay in the background."

"Quite right, Major," Elton replied. "But when I heard your plans for tonight, I changed my mind. Thanks for giving me an assignment. You know, I really believe that what you're doing tonight offers some mighty interesting possibilities."

ELTON, leaving the G-2 office, hurried to overtake Dole and Mullins before they were swallowed up by the trenches. The two were in high fettle over their work, but steeped in mystery and caution.

"Take our word for it, Captain," said Dole, "but we're collecting Von Grier and a hatful of francs tonight."

"Possibly," Elton said dubiously. "But I'd like to hear better reasons for thinking so than I've yet heard."

"Well, we can tell you this much," Dole rejoined. "Even without tonight's party, we got evidence enough to act on. All we're after is more evidence. If Von Grier don't nibble at the bait tonight, why we grab him anyhow at stand-to in the morning."

"So you have a suspect in tow?"

"Yes—in confidence—we got a line on our man."

"Who?"

"Beg the Captain's pardon, but that's a tip we got in strict confidence."

"See here, you lads. You came here at my orders. You will tell me what I want to know."

Dole and Mullins exchanged injured glances. But they yielded to Elton's tart demand. Dole cupped his hands and whispered his report.

"You got to promise not to tell anybody, sir. But it's one of our own officers —Lieutenant Evarts, 807th Infantry. Mother was born in Germany. Looks like a Fritz. Smooth as velvet and cold as ice. But we got wind that he's shy his maps and regulations and part of his equipment. Also, he's been hanging around regimental headquarters a whole lot. Knows how to peck a typewriter with two fingers. Keeps to himself and nobody likes him. Ask yourself, Captain, what's he done with those secret maps and regulations of his? We'd have grabbed him before now and searched his dugout, if it wasn't for trying to catch him red handed tonight."

"I see," said Elton thoughtfully. "Does sound suspicious. Who gave you the tip?"

"That'd be breaking a downright confidence, Captain. But it's somebody knows his stuff—and I'll be free to tell you tomorrow."

"Some one who is working with you on this case?"

"I'm not breaking faith, sir."

Elton named over the officers who were directing the chase, putting their names one at a time in the form of a sharp query. Dole and Mullins shook their heads, not in denial but in affirmation that the secret was not now to be broken. He studied their reactions to the names of Chase and Boll. Normal.

"Captain Fallon?" he shot at them.

"But you can't expect us to break our word!" Mullins put in fretfully.

Elton broke off the inquisition with a shrug and turned to leave.

"All right, I'll not interfere with your plans or your ethics, gentlemen. I leave the case in your hands—and the best of luck to you."

The slenderest thread now turned the balance of his interest toward Fallon. He had read it clearly in Mullins' face that it was Fallon who had given them their information under a seal of secrecy. Why? But then Fallon might have honest reasons; and there was a broader trail leading to the suspected officer, Evarts, who had lost his regulations and maps. Elton retraced his steps to the personnel office and guardedly fished out the records of Fallon and Evarts.

Another straw was added here, one that might mean little or add much. Evarts was an accountant in civil life, born in Chicago. His father was American, his mother German. He had entered by the training camp route. Fallon's card showed birth in Denmark, father Scotch, mother Danish. Both parents dead. Education in the United States, where he had lived since the age of ten. In civil life financial secretary of a large brokerage concern at Washington, D. C. Entered officers' training camp at outbreak of war, commissioned first lieutenant, promoted to captain overseas for demonstrated fitness as a company commander. Now on duty as acting regimental intelligence officer.

With this information weighed, digested and stored away for possible future consideration, Elton swung through the trenches and maneuvered for a personal study of Lieutenant Evarts. The description given by Dole had been accurate. Evarts was thick lipped, phlegmatic of temperament, and of a decided Teuton mold. And if Von Grier, he was able to mask the sharp intelligence of his brain under a dull, boorish stare.

SERGEANT WALTERS was in wait for him in a communicating trench, to show him to their dugout. The old noncom had fitted up a comfortable hole that was located conveniently in a line of trenches about midway between the jump-off ditch and division P. C.

"There's sure a lot of feeling in this outfit," Walters reported. "That loose Boche has got everybody by the ears, and jumpy. I been stopped myself four times and my whole life mulled over. Wouldn't think so many men could get so excited over one Prussian, sir. Must be a raw outfit."

"But that's enough to make the best outfit jumpy," said Elton. "They know there's a dangerous traitor in camp, and can't get any trail of him. Everybody suspects everybody else. Must be like feeling a snake crawling into bed with you."

"If questions is in order, has the Cap'n got any leads yet?"

Elton smiled thoughtfully and sat down on an empty ammunition case.

"Well, yes and no, Walters. This is an unusual case, one of the simplest and yet one of the hardest we've ever tackled. I've already decided that there's no such thing as getting Von Grier's trail. I mean by that his physical trail. At least not in such a way that we can get the evidence. He's smart enough, and well enough entrenched to prevent that. But that doesn't mean we're blocked, Walters. There's such a thing as a mental

trail, and I think we'll be following that mighty fast before the night is over."

"Too deep for me, sir," said Walters, with a nettled shake of his grizzled head. "I reckon there'll not be much for me to do."

"Very much to the contrary, Walters, you'll get a mighty ticklish part to play in my first move tonight. It may be very dangerous, and it may come to nothing. But if it succeeds—well, we'll be on a live trail, with a good chance of landing Von Grier before morning. I'm willing to risk the danger, just to hurry this case through for Colonel Rand's especial benefit. He was a bit disagreeable about it last night."

"Yes'r!" Walters' eyes danced at the hint of action. "Glad I can have a hand."

"I'll really have to count on you to the very limit—now and later, Walters. You'd better hustle together half a dozen trusted huskies, men you can count upon. Report back to me here right after dark, and I'll have your instructions ready for you in detail."

Elton lay on an improvised bed in the dugout until well after dark, plotting his first play of wits with the elusive Von Grier. It was a coup in which he might play a close game with his life or liberty, yet if it worked out he would be on a hot scent, Von Grier's whereabouts, if not his identity, stripped of the slightest uncertainty. Walters reported back at dark, his men in waiting for him at a convenient rendezvous forward. After rehearsing with the greatest care the rôle Walters was to play, Elton sent the sergeant forward, ate an emergency ration, and set out for his place of assignment, Point 246.784.

The trenches lay massed in black shadows, thinned here and there along the traverses by the glow of starlight. With the aid of an outpost officer, Elton finally located his place of vigil, just behind the wire in an isolated trench of the outpost line. He took up a slow pacing back and forth along this trench, eyes and ears straining into the vague starlight about him, every faculty alert.

Half an hour passed without incident. Elton's tension was relaxing, his hopes thinning. Upon his first maneuver he had gambled boldly for the trail. The officers at the conference had heard the discordant note he cast into their deliberations, the demand for this assignment. They had heard the G-2 major give out the map location of his present position. Elton had done this in the belief that if Von Grier was represented at that meeting, as he suspected, the Prussian would strike promptly. Therefore, failure at this point would mean that his deductions were awry, that he must seek a new plan with nothing better than surmise upon which to build.

But his growing gloom was shattered presently by a movement close at hand, one that he sensed rather than heard. A black silhouette appeared shortly, marching in upon his position through the trench. Elton's pulse hammered despite his fine self-possession, though more from expectancy than from fear. The figure half passed him, and halted as if to exchange the password. The fellow leaned close, seemed to catch the glint of starlight on the silver captain's bars that Elton obligingly had left at his shoulders, and galvanized into action. Elton felt the sharp thrust of an automatic muzzle in his midriff.

"Not a sound!" rasped the shadow. "Move on ahead of me down this trench and no questions. Start anything and I shoot!"

Elton obeyed, moving at a quick stride, prodded by the fellow's pistol, now held at his back. His captor's purpose was all too evident; to force him through the wires into No Man's Land and across to the German trenches, an easy prize of Von Grier's boastful prowess. Thirty yards of trench intervened before it flattened out into a grassy defile, smothered in barbed wire. Captor and victim had covered half that distance when the voice behind whispered a command to halt. Directly ahead of them, out of the shadows, loomed a patrol coming in from the wires.

"A word, Cap'n, and you're done!"

whispered the shadow. "If that patrol challenges, answer 'officer of the outpost' and keep right on moving."

AS THE TWO kept on, Elton's gait unslackened. The patrol leader challenged in a low, crisp voice. Elton replied according to orders and was moving on by. But the patrol leader was persistent. He barred the way, flashed a spotlight across Elton's face and demanded a copy of his orders.

"I am Captain Elton, military intelligence," he said coolly. "My orders authorize me to go where I please. This is one of my men with me."

The other stooped down in the trench to examine the orders under his flashlight.

"All right, Cap'n," he replied. "Your orders is O. K. But it's lucky I come along. There's been a change of route through the wire. We'll show you the way out. Move right straight on ahead. We'll follow."

The authoritative voice of the patrol leader invited no parley. Elton felt the muzzle hurriedly withdrawn from his back, but his assailant leaned close and breathed a dire warning into his ear.

"You're covered—don't try anything!"

They were close to the end of the trench, a huddle of silent black shadows, when a sudden, furious commotion broke. The crash of a rifle across the top of a steel helmet, an explosion, a savage cry of pain. Elton whirled instantly into the conflict, but it was ended before he could act. His captor lay sprawled at the bottom of the trench, the patrol leader over him. The fellow was disarmed and dragged to his feet, limp and moaning. Since his legs sagged under him, the victim was carried by the patrol back to the battle positions and into a large, lighted dugout.

"Sure, sir, that was a ticklish bit of business," said Walters with an explosive sigh of relief. "Clouting that Fritz before he could pull a trigger took some close figuring. But it was a chance worth taking, now we got our man."

They revived the stunned man with a swallow of cognac and a bucket of cold water. When they had washed the blood from his face and made him recognizable, Elton launched an inquisition. But the prisoner clung to a sullen silence, a silence in capture that was the most exacting part of German training. Finally accepting the futility of parley, Elton gave instructions that the fellow be held closely guarded in the dugout and motioned Walters outside.

"There's no further time to lose, Sergeant," said Elton, leading off at a hurried gait. "We've got to work right on schedule now, if we're going to land Von Grier tonight."

"Von Grier?" exclaimed Walters in blank amazement. "Sure and ain't that him we took all them chances to land, sir?"

"Only one of Von Grier's strongarm assistants," said Elton disgustedly. "A dumb henchman assigned by Von Grier to get me in tow and deliver me over to the German lines, Walters. But we know what we're about now, for certain. Even if we don't know who Von Grier is, we know where to find his trail; and if I'm not gambling wrong on his makeup, we'll have him in the bag tonight with evidence enough to convict him before any court in France. Thirty minutes at the dugout, and it'll be Von Grier's zero hour."

"Yes'r," assented the puzzled Walters.

At their dugout, Elton lighted candles and brought forth from his musette bag a small vial of acid of lead, applied the fluid to his thumb and pressed his thumb to the captured Von Grier cipher message. Then he developed the print into visibility and handed the document to Walters.

"Ever see a clearer print of a thumb than that?" Elton inquired.

"Nos'r. It's a perfect picture of the Cap'n's thumb, but I don't see—"

"Now listen to your instructions, Walters. When you leave here, go back and get three of your men, leaving the others on guard over our prisoner. At eleven o'clock, not a minute before, search the

dugout of every officer whose name I have written on this list—seven of them. Give special attention to the effects of Lieutenant Evarts and Captain Fallon. If you find anything out of the ordinary rush it to me direct, at the division P. C.—chief-of-staff's office. If you find nothing, report that fact as well. Do you understand clearly—"

Elton broke off with a sharp exclamation. Walters whirled at the same moment. With a decisiveness that wasted no precious fraction of a second he leaped to the door of the dugout, seized a small pear shaped object that had been shunted inside and, with the same movement, cast it out into the night. A sharp, resonant detonation hurled the door wide open and shook the earth about them. Walters turned to Elton, his green eyes aflame as he drew his automatic.

"I'm going out after the snake that rolled that grenade in on us!" he bellowed.

Elton sprang to the door, closed it securely and barred the way with a shake of his head.

"No use, Sergeant," he said quietly. "He's on his way by now—with seven seconds lead from the time he pulled the ring of that grenade. And it doesn't take him long to move, judging by the way he found out we had his henchman. Von Grier has just paid us the compliment of trying to rid himself of our presence at any cost. You certainly showed presence of mind, Walters. I didn't even sense the danger entirely before you dived for it. Well, you'll deserve every centime of the five thousand francs you're going to collect tonight for that rascal's carcass."

"Five thousand francs, Cap'n? For what?"

"For trapping Von Grier."

"I'm telling the Cap'n," vowed Walters, "it'll be a pleasure now for me to have a part in that game, and me donate a month's pay for the chance. All I'm asking is a chance to do my bit."

"You're going to have more than that, Walters. Unless our whole plan fails, you're going to be the one to catch Von Grier. And if we should fumble the job tonight, I think you'll agree that this is going to be an unhealthy place for us."

UNTIL the hour of the eleven o'clock rendezvous, Elton clung to the dugout with the heavy door securely closed. Then he released Walters and proceeded back through the trench network to the rambling stone village that housed the division post of command. Keeping to himself in the shadows as a precaution against further treachery, Elton sat with eyes fixed upon the now darkened headquarters building. An hour ticked by with no other signs of life than an occasional runner entering or leaving the message center in an adjoining building. The moon swung finally over the Vosges foothills, flooding the area with a soft, silvery light. Elton edged farther back into the shadows and waited on.

A lone figure appeared finally, coming from the direction of the trenches. The man was erect, and the moon picked out a shiny Sam Browne belt as he walked without hesitation straight to the chief-of-staff's office, boldly tried the door and, at finding it unlocked, went inside.

There was a quick converging of stealthy figures, as the watchers closed upon their quarry. Elton hurried to a window with the others and watched the strange drama that unfolded. The intruder, inside, worked without caution. He deliberately lighted a lamp, crossed to the chief-of-staff's desk, fumbled for the secret orders and put them in his pocket. He was recrossing the room to extinguish the light when the intelligence group precipitated themselves into the room with drawn pistols.

"Put up your hands!" roared Dole. "No funny business goes this time!"

Lieutenant Evarts, arrested in the act of turning out the light, looked from one to the other with blinking eyes.

"What's all the excitement?" he stammered. "Why all the hardware? What's going on, anyhow?"

"A cool one, Herr Fritz!" cried Mullins.

"But we got you cold this time, Von Grier. Stepped right into the trap."

"Von Grier?" echoed Evarts. His face gathered in a snarl. "Say, this is carrying monkey business too far. I'm Lieutenant Evarts, B Company, 807th Infantry, here on official business for my regimental commander."

The G-2 major emitted a derisive curse.

"Not a very lucky stall, that one, Von Grier," he barked. "Colonel Wilkins of the 807th went to the railhead at Toul this morning and isn't due back until tomorrow."

"But—but it was the colonel called me on the phone and told me," stammered Evarts. He turned suddenly livid as it dawned upon him that no hoax lay behind the level, accusing eyes before him. "I know his voice, and he said to come about midnight—"

"Save your breath!" snapped the major. "You're insulting our intelligence. We got you in a trap you can't wiggle out of this time."

"But this—this is absurd," Evarts wailed. "I can prove everything. You're making a terrible mistake, gentlemen."

"Do you deny, sir," snapped the major, "being short your area maps, your training regulations and some of your equipment?"

Evarts reeled at this charge, his eyes stark in sudden fear as he saw the net closing about him.

"Why, they—that is," he stammered, "I just lost them—or somebody stole them."

"Don't waste any more time on his stalling," roared the major. "Cuff him up and we'll put him through the quiz. But we've got evidence enough now to hang him on."

Evarts was promptly handcuffed to a chair for security, other lights were brought into the room, and a G-2 inquisition was launched by the major, with an occasional question interposed by one of the others. Through these developments, Elton kept in the background; covertly studying faces, consulting his watch from time to time anxiously. Although he had fixed upon his own course, he decided to sit in silent observation until he heard the result of Walter's search.

One o'clock had passed before an orderly tiptoed into the room with whispered information that Captain Elton was wanted outside.

Walters was contained but jubilant. He laid out his find ostentatiously—sets of rank insignia ranging from second lieutenant to lieutenant-colonel, several pairs of horn rimmed glasses, pigment and brushes used in diguise, a ball pen and magnifying glass.

"How's that for evidence, sir?" Walters chuckled.

"Perfect!" exclaimed Elton. "Where did you unearth them?"

"Last place we looked in, sir. Lieutenant Evarts' dugout, hid in a old French gas mask that was hanging to the wall."

"Evarts' dugout?" exclaimed Elton. He eyed Walters in momentary perplexity. "You're sure of that?"

"Positive, Cap'n."

"That's everything you found?"

"Everything except these two things, sir." Walters brought from the floor an ordinary container of hydrogen gas, and laid beside it a small deflated toy balloon. "Couldn't see anything to these trinkets, but brought them along anyhow."

"From Evarts' dugout?"

"Nos'r. Cap'n Boll's, sir."

"You're absolutely positive of that, Walters?"

"Couldn't be mistook, sir. Found them laying on top of his desk right out in plain sight."

"That's odd," said Elton. "Well, step outside. I've another job to tell you about —and I've got to hurry back into that office with these little trinkets."

UPON re-entering the chief-of-staff's office, Elton crossed the room, threw open a window and ostentatiously took several breaths of fresh air. Then he settled down in silence to the now heated examination of the bedeviled Evarts. The suspect

was in a muddle as volleys of questions were fired at him, first by one then the other. Boll sat in cold appraisal of the proceedings, interjecting no questions. Fallon's face was flushed, a sparkle in his cold gray eyes. He finally rose.

"Pardon, Major," said Fallon, "but we have evidence enough, and our prisoner seems disinclined to add his confession. The hour is late, and since stand-to is so outrageously early, might I propose turning the rascal over to the military police so we can get some sleep."

"An excellent idea, Captain," agreed the G-2 major. He rose, pushed back his chair and reached for his cap. "Von Grier has cost us enough sleep as it is."

There was a shuffling of chairs. The inquisition at an end, the officers were eager to return to their dugouts for sleep, content in their night's achievement. Elton stepped to the front at this instant and raised his hand. The eyes of all swung to him in mingled surprise and annoyance. The G-2 major launched a protest against the delay, but bit off his sentence as Elton calmly spread his exhibits on the table before their eyes.

"These interesting bits of evidence, gentlemen," said Elton, "were found just now by one of my men—found concealed in an old French gas mask in the dugout of Lieutenant Evarts, our prisoner."

He sat back, his eyes passing among them as their interest centered upon the articles. He caught a gleam of amusement deep in Fallon's eyes, the veriest twinkle of abnormal reaction that might mean nothing—or much.

"But notwithstanding all this, gentlemen," Elton added presently, with a cool deliberation, "notwithstanding the evidence of our own eyes here tonight, I contend that Lieutenant Evarts is innocent. He is not Von Grier, nor one of Von Grier's agents."

The G-2 major choked impotently and began stammering a hot protest. But before he could gather his voice, Elton proceeded:

"First of all, gentlemen, Von Grier is not simple enough to put his feet in such a clumsy trap as the one we laid for him here tonight, nor to leave any such telltale evidence in his dugout. In fact, Von Grier is too well covered in this division, too shrewd in his methods, to leave any physical trail whatsoever that would hold water before any military court in the country. In dealing with such a man, therefore, we've got to play him at his own game. And that is what we are going to do—prove to him that Prussian intelligence is not so superior as he seems to think.

"And, finally, gentlemen, Von Grier is seated among us in this room, hearing what I say, sublimely secure in the belief that he is infallible."

There was a tense silence. Elton's eyes passed from face to face. His eyes rested first upon Boll, then Fallon. But those officers were as coolly collected, as impersonally tense, as the others.

"I will now present my case," Elton went on. "I have two more exhibits that were unearthed by my sergeant. This, you may see, is an ordinary rubber balloon and this cylinder contains ordinary hydrogen gas for inflating it. An excellent emergency method, would you not all agree, for sending secret messages across the lines at night when the wind was favorable? These articles were found in the dugout of an officer here present."

Captain Boll rose quietly, his eyes blinking, an anxious look across his features.

"Doubtless they came from my dugout," he confessed. "I have been helping with some tests, and they are kept in my place for convenience, as my friend—"

Fallon leaped to his feet, fury blazing in his eyes.

"An insult!" he barked. "An infernal outrage. Those things belong to me—they're my property. Furnished to me by division headquarters for my experiments in developing a new type of artillery signal. I demand an instant apology for bringing my property into this mess!"

"You're going too far with your strange whims, Captain Elton," broke in the G-2

major hotly. "Your conduct requires some immediate explanation. What single rational reason have you to offer against the evidence we hold against this prisoner Evarts? Why, on a flimsy argument, do you attempt to set valid evidence at naught? How do you explain Evarts' appearance here tonight, the presence in his dugout of such damaging evidence as your own man uncovered?"

"Very simply, Major, if you will bear with me," Elton replied patiently. "Von Grier has merely arranged to trap an innocent victim, so as to clear his own trail of annoyances. I'm sorry if I've offended any one. But before you shut me off, or insist upon apologies, let me lay out my further exhibits.

"This, gentlemen, is a familiar document—this captured sketch. You, in particular, Major, tried to reason out its meaning. One reason you failed was that it happens to be a German cipher message, done in invisible ink. Here, let me explain it to you."

He had taken from his pocketbook the Von Grier cipher sketch and spread it on the table before them. He traced out for them, a letter at a time, the significant phrase: "Targets by Next Wind."

"A coincidence," blazed Fallon. "I resent the inference."

Their eyes met in silent conflict. Elton read a momentary fear, a mere fleeting glint of terror, then Fallon mastered himself, and met Elton fairly, fully, with a touch of banter. His rising assurance was eloquent of his thoughts.

"Of course, Captain Fallon, I don't blame you for feeling as you do, if you take my words personally," Elton said softly. "But I am most impersonal, sir. Please, all of you, to note the bottom of this cipher message of Von Grier's. A thumbprint, is it not? Acid of lead, the invisible ink used in this instance, is supposed to fade out shortly, when properly diluted before application. But you will note how clearly this print is preserved. A little trick of my own, which Von Grier did not anticipate when he pressed his thumb in authentication of his message. Perfect, is it not? Every line preserved."

Elton paused, reached to the floor and brought to the table a regimental set for recording fingerprints.

"And now, gentlemen, we can quickly settle this whole affair, to the satisfaction of all concerned. I mean this as personal to no one. But since we have the cipher print of Von Grier's thumb, we need only compare it with your prints. As you know, fingerprints do not lie. One at a time, gentlemen, thumbs down!"

Four of the officers had submitted to the test when the tense silence of the room was broken by a sudden upturning of a chair. Fallon was on his feet, a drawn automatic thrust in front of him, as he backed slowly across the room to the open window.

"Move at your risk!" he cautioned. "I warn against following me for five minutes. Once out that window, I shall shoot at sight." At the window, as he eased himself through, he shot a quick, taunting glance at Elton. "And thank you, dear Captain, for opening the window."

As Von Grier's head shot out of sight, the officers leaped as one man to their feet and turned to the door. Elton barred the way, a hand raised before him.

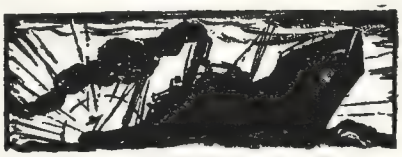
"Please have no uneasiness, gentlemen," he exclaimed. "From my study of the fellow I suspected he would act like that in a pinch, once those pet inks and ciphers rose up to accuse him. A sergeant and three men were waiting for him under the window, and they'll have him back here in a moment."

The G-2 major's wits returned.

"But if you had his fingerprints," he stormed, "we could have got him simple enough if you'd told us. We got a record of every hand in the—"

"Doubtless," said Elton quietly, with a disconcerting smile. "But it so happens that that print is of my own thumb. But perhaps you'll agree it's a wise German who knows his own fingerprints, Major; and now I'd suggest that Lieutenant Evarts would be more comfortable if you'd release his wrists."

The TYPHOON



By HARRY KEMP

WHEN the typhoon dropped down on us and the seas began to break,
The blue drift of Formosa had left our foamy wake:
We'd a hold of fretful cattle, frightened sheep, men's lives at stake—
Us, tossing in the forecastle, all so hot we couldn't sleep;
The cattle in the sweltering hold; on the upper decks, the sheep,
And—from China to America—the whole Pacific's sweep!
When they brought us on at Sydney we took it for a joke:
One swagman laid his cig'ret down that he'd begun to smoke
Before he signed the articles with slow, unpractised stroke . . .
We nosed from Sydney Harbor; we sailed the sleeping seas;
Took cattle on at Brisbane like a bushman takes disease;
And we dropped down Brisbane River where the mangoes bend their knees.
It was azure, off the Solomons, though hot as devils' play,
But each young man will have his fling, as every dog his day—
And inferno is a bagatelle to youth whose heart is gay!
We boasted our adventures, vaunted high our hardihood;
We argued of the cities and the lands that we'd found good;
We fed and watered Queensland steers as only young men could.
When that typhoon dropped down on us, we sang another song;
Some fellows sank upon their knees confessing they'd done wrong.
It only blew a little bit; we were glad it wasn't long.
When the typhoon had gone over, spoke the captain to the mate—
"Well, Mate, I guess we weathered it!" "Aye, sir, we done first rate!
"Them seas that rose agin us are dwindlin' from their spate.
"Ten steers, sir, have been drownded; six sheep went off, a-lee,
"An' we lost that lad from Melbourne that came to learn the sea—
"But, every other ways, our ship, she's fit as fit can be!"

Beginning a Two-Part

CHAPTER I

AMBUSH

"TRICKED, by thunder! Done in by a rotten—!"

Tanner's blood-tinged gutturals, and the queer look of utter amaze on his face as he had gone down clutching at his chest, still puzzled and haunted Crosby; puzzled him even more than the sudden and murderous fusillade that had scattered his peaceful expedition to Walla's town in every direction at once.

Just who was rotten and who had tricked Mark Tanner he had not learned. There had been neither time nor opportunity to learn any more. Tanner had made no answer to Crosby's hoarse and hurried questions, but had lain where he had fallen, and the helpless Kroo boy carriers and houseboys who had accompanied the expedition of peace had immediately broken and fled in spite of Crosby's and Dick Ketterell's efforts to hold them together. And when, in the succeeding second or two, Ketterell's right leg was riddled with splinters of pot legs or rusty nails, and Tanner seemed to be too badly hit to be helped by any one, there had really been nothing for him, Crosby, to do but lend Ketterell a hand and try to follow the fleeing Brinsley back to the *Valiant*.

"Run for it, you damned fool!" Ketterell had said, when Crosby had hesitated momentarily between him and Tanner. "Can't you see he's done for? And I can take care of myself. Go on! Run! Brinsley won't let the *Valiant* wait for you if you don't."

Ketterell had seemed to be right about Tanner, even though he had been lying

Story of the Slave Coast

SHADOW *of the* PYTHON

By

ROBERT SIMPSON

about his ability to take care of himself. So Crosby's subconscious hesitation had been immediately dissolved by Ketterell's own attitude in the matter, and he had given Ketterell a hand simply as a matter of course, while Ketterell continued to advise him not to be a ruddy fool and to run for it while he still had legs.

Ketterell was the engineer in charge of the public works department at Segwanga, where Crosby officiated as district commissioner, and he had joined Crosby's expedition to talk to old Walla about the age old importance of building roads—a subject with which Walla was so familiar that he had no interest in it whatever.

Brinsley, of the treasury department, and also of Segwanga, who had made such excellent use of his legs just then, had been going to demonstrate to Walla how many more puncheons of palm oil he could bring to the white traders' beaches —and particularly to Tanner's beach—if he would be helpful instead of antagonistic to his Britannic Majesty's Southern Nigerian government, of which he, Brinsley, and Crosby and Ketterell, were the assumably humble representatives.

Mark Tanner, an old and very intimate friend of Walla's, had represented the trading element; and as Crosby helped Ketterell hobble after Brinsley in a painfully slow and very desperate retreat to the power launch *Valiant*, the hopelessness of trying to do anything for Mark Tanner then was altogether apparent.

When they would reach the *Valiant* and thereafter join the sternwheeler *Vixen* with Captain Brant and his Yoruba soldiers and machine guns on board, the situation would be somewhat different; particularly since Walla so definitely ap-

peared to prefer war to peace. But in the meantime . . .

Then, at the end of a ghastly retreat to the waterfront, they discovered that the *Valiant* was not where she was supposed to be, and that Brant and the *Vixen* had not shown up and did not seem in the least likely to show up in time to do them any good.

And in the succeeding hours of that blistering West African day, retreating along slithering bush paths that led heaven knew whither, Crosby was many times compelled to admit to himself that there was nothing he could have done for Mark Tanner. Nothing at all. Particularly after Ketterell could no longer hobble for more than a yard or two, but had to be carried almost every step of the way, while old Walla's chalked up, blue-white devils howled fearsomely in the black African night that had, with doubtful mercy, closed down upon them.

Every time Crosby had stopped to prop Ketterell against a tree, he had assured himself that there had been no chance at all to go back and bring Mark Tanner out. No chance at all. And when Brinsley, who had long since given up all pretense of being a man, clung to Crosby's ragged shirt sleeve and whimpered for the *Vixen* and Brant and the Yoruba soldiers, like a frightened child whimpering for a light in the dark that was filled with devils, Crosby became doubly sure that there was nothing at all he could have done for Tanner.

And now, at the junction of several paths, Crosby paused again to get his breath, leaned Ketterell against a huge mango tree, gripped Brinsley's arm and, telling him to shut up, vaguely tried to decide which path led back to the water.

"Damn you, Crosby! Don't stand here!" Brinsley shrieked above the hellish din Walla's *juju* crazed fanatics were making. "If you can't carry him, leave him! You left Tanner behind after promising him protection. And Tanner isn't even one of us. He's a trader. If you could leave him behind to those beasts—"

"Go on, Crosby," Ketterell grunted, and sagged away from the support of Crosby's arm. "Brinsley's right. That's how it will look back in Segwanga, and—Oh, where in hell is Brant? Why did you leave him behind at Goba? Why doesn't he show up? Why— Oh, go on, Crosby! Make a break for it without me. I'm getting as peevish as an old woman and—and those ruddy pellets in my leg seem to be going to my head."

KETTERELL lurched and almost fell, but Crosby held him up and, with a weary look all about him, convinced himself yet again that there was nothing he could have done for Tanner in a situation such as that had been. Perhaps if the Kroo boys hadn't broken as they did; perhaps if Brinsley hadn't taken to his heels; perhaps—no, Tanner had been too badly hit, and Ketterell, who had also needed help, knew that there was nothing they could have done for Tanner then.

Besides, Tanner, of his own volition, had dispensed with Yoruba protection; had, in fact, insisted that the *Vixen* be left behind at Goba, which was outside Walla's territory, twenty-odd miles to the south.

Of course, Brinsley and Ketterell did not know that Tanner had insisted upon the *Vixen* being left there. Headquarters at Segwanga did not know it. No one did or ever would. Everybody thought and would continue to think that leaving the *Vixen* at Goba had been Crosby's own idea, because Crosby had given Tanner his word that he would not divulge to any one Tanner's share in promoting and directing the expedition.

Tanner's reasons for demanding secrecy in the matter had been plausible enough. For, in spite of what had actually happened, Tanner was Walla's friend—an old, old friend—and it had been Tanner himself who, knowing old Walla so intimately, had first proposed making the peaceful gesture to Walla's town.

One night, after dinner, on the veranda

of Tanner's own bungalow in Segwanga, Tanner had said to Crosby:

"I know, Jim, that Walla is in need of a licking or a lesson of some sort, and I'm giving you good advice when I say there is no time like the present; but, after all, I am a trader first and last, and I can't afford to antagonize the old devil by being a party to even a peaceful military gesture against him. I know you are not going to take those soldier-men with you because you want to fight, but just because you want to give Walla the hint that you can protect yourself if you have to. But he won't like it. It'll make him mad as hell and—well, he brings business to my beach and when you induce him to come to his senses before he goes too far, I expect him to bring me more business than ever. But not if he knows I am advising you what to do—particularly if you take those soldier-men along. You can see that, can't you?"

Crosby had seen it without any difficulty and, as something had to be done about Walla to prevent an uprising that would be both bloody and expensive—

"All right, Mark," Crosby had agreed. "You'll come along as my guest, and mum's the word all around."

"Thanks, Jim. And—" with a quick glance into the room behind him to see if Diana Tanner, his wife, were within hearing— "you'll leave the *Vixen* and the Yoruba at Goba?"

"At Goba," Crosby had repeated slowly, "pending further orders as circumstances may dictate."

Then Diana had come out to join them; and if he knew Diana Tanner at all, Crosby knew *she* would surely understand that there had been nothing he could have done for Mark. And since he had managed so far to bring Dick Ketterell out—Dick Ketterell, for whom Diana Tanner . . .

Brinsley's teeth were chattering and the one remaining houseboy—Brinsley's—who had stayed with them, suddenly bolted down a path of his own blind choosing and disappeared. A moment later the trunk of the mango tree was spattered with an indiscriminate and ragged hail of slugs and pot legs and bullets, and Brinsley's sun helmet leaped off his head as if a spectral hand had reached out and tossed it into the dark.

Brinsley screamed and crouched against the mango tree in pitiful terror. Crosby's revolver barked twice and Ketterell flung two more shots along the path behind them. Another scream and a thick moan answered. Then came silence—a whispering, breath taking silence more terrible than any pandemonium.

"They—they'll kill me!" Brinsley whimpered. They'll kill me!"

"No such luck," Ketterell grunted in a heavy, sleepy kind of way. "Your kind don't—"

Brinsley suddenly bolted.

"Come back!" Crosby shouted. "Where the devil are—"

The deafening roar of a muzzle loader drowned Crosby's voice and a strip of bark from the mango tree clipped him on the chin. The place where Brinsley had been seemed to produce a perfect hail of mango bark for a second or two.

"Better get away from here," Ketterell mumbled, "and follow Brinsley. He seems to have more sense in his legs than we have in our heads." He laughed thickly. "Wonder how the women will get along without me?"

Crosby winced under cover of the dark and put a firmer arm around Ketterell's shoulders. On the surface, at least, there was no reason why Ketterell's remark about women should make Crosby wince or show any concern whatever. Dick Ketterell's popularity with the ladies, and still more particularly, the ladies' popularity with Ketterell, were matters of common knowledge from Conakry to Calabar. And Crosby had known Ketterell and his weaknesses for years.

But when Crosby carried Ketterell slowly and painfully away from the mango tree to follow the path Brinsley had taken, Crosby wondered if there might not have been something he could have done for Mark Tanner.

Of course, Ketterell was the man Diana Tanner wanted. No doubt about that. But Ketterell was such a scatter brained fool where women were concerned that, as a husband for Diana—well, even Mark Tanner who was no more in love with his wife than she was with him . . .

"What the devil's that?" Ketterell asked thickly. "Brinsley?"

"It should be Brinsley," Crosby said above a savage yell that seemed to fill all the jungle behind them. "But it sounded like a laugh to me. And Brinsley, poor devil, isn't—am I seeing things? What are we running into now?"

"Looks like a rest house."

"No. It isn't that. Not here. It's—"

From out of the shadow of a low mud wall that had suddenly reared itself across their path, Brinsley leaped toward them, waving his arms at them and laughing—the hysterical laughter of a man who has been frightened into a kind of uncontrollable mirth.

"It's *juju*, Crosby! *Juju!* We're safe! They won't shoot us here! They'll be afraid to shoot us here!"

The altogether unearthly scream of baffled rage that lifted itself into the blackness behind them, seemed to indicate that Brinsley was right, particularly when they passed beyond the low mud wall and came upon the square, wattle roofed hut beyond.

But as the shooting and the shouting ceased simultaneously, Crosby had a sudden thought that came to him out of his mental files of *juju* worship.

"Wait," he cautioned. "Walla and his people originally hailed from the Brass country. And in the Brass country—Wait here, Brinsley, and hang on to Ketterell while I take a look around."

"What for? Damn you, Crosby! If you desert us—"

"Shut up," Ketterell growled. "Crosby knows what he's doing. Ever been down in the Brass country, Brinsley?"

"No-no."

"That's a pity,"—drowsily. "You missed—something worthwhile. They take pythons to bed with 'em—down there."

"Pythons! What—what has that to do with this place?"

Ketterell did not say. He slipped to his knees out of Brinsley's fumbling grasp and flung forward upon his face. Brinsley whimpered and ran toward Crosby who was peering into the hut through one of the small windows. With his revolver ready for any emergency he lighted a match.

Brinsley at his elbow saw the thing at the same time.

"Fifteen feet if I'm an inch," Crosby said to himself, and heard a thin, pale sound at his elbow.

"Kill it!" Brinsley squeaked and his revolver poked frantically through the window hole. "Kill it!"

Crosby dropped the match, gripped Brinsley's wrist and forced the gun's muzzle downward.

"You damned fool! That python's life is—"

But Brinsley did not hear the rest of it. He fell away from Crosby and the window hole, and collapsed like an empty sack.

He had fainted.

CHAPTER II

DRUMS OF DEATH

THE PYTHON, as Crosby was aware, was just one of many scattered throughout Walla's territory where the python cult was rampant. It was a lordly but sleepy reptile and, obviously accustomed to human contact and evidently assured of being sacred and inviolate, it paid no attention whatever to the white men who had found sanctuary in its official residence.

Neither did it give any heed to the incessant beating of tom-toms that, for a night and a day, circled the *juju* hut like a wall that moved and spoke in an ominous monotone that never tired.

Sometimes the voice of the tom-toms was a low hum, sometimes a swelling cry that seemed to come from the far deeps of the jungle and threatened to lift to a

crescendo of hate and action at the very next beat.

But Crosby knew better than that. He knew that Walla's chalked up fanatics of the python cult would not attack for fear of killing the lordly and sacred python; and though he had heard of cases where pythons had been called forth out of possible danger at infidel hands by the powers of the priests, this did not seem to apply to this python, which, as Crosby suspected, was too full of suckling pig to bother very much about anything.

In fact, at the conclusion of almost twenty-four wakeful hours in sanctuary, after repelling several cautious and inquiring assaults upon the hut, Crosby had to confess that, of the three charges on his hands, the python was the least troublesome. If necessary, too, he could always shoot the python; a method of relief that was hardly possible where Brinsley was concerned.

Among the barbaric gee-gaws and sacrificial offerings within this particular *juju* shrine, Crosby had found nothing that might have served as food. Fruits, *tomba*, yams, gin, even livestock—all sorts of edible and drinkable things were always a possibility; but the python had been too recently fed and the priest of the place had probably collected his perquisites within the past day or so.

Crosby knew that Brinsley, as well as Ketterell and himself, had carried a well filled flask of whisky or brandy. Ketterell's flask was now empty and most of the contents had gone, not down his throat, but to soak the rough bandage around the bad leg. Crosby's shirt, which had been ruined by miscellaneous "bullets" anyway, had been sacrificed in the cause of first aid, and most of Crosby's liquor had been devoted to keeping Ketterell alive.

Brinsley still had his shirt, and the contents of his flask was a secret, that, as yet, was known only to himself. Since they had entered the *juju* hut Crosby had not even seen the flask, but he was quite sure Brinsley had made good, surreptitious use of it.

Huddling in the corner of the hut farthest away from the ghastly coils of the python and fumbling nervously with his service revolver, Brinsley seemed determined to hang on to all that he possessed just as tenaciously as he wanted so pitifully to hang on to life.

However, in the small clearing outside the hut, Crosby had stumbled upon a small water barrel that contained a supply of very doubtful water; and among the priestly effects was an empty demijohn and a three legged iron pot in which, among other things, many magic potions had doubtless bubbled into being over slow midnight fires.

Thus, Crosby came into possession of a demijohn of boiled water, and while Brinsley whined and whimpered incessantly for food and his share of the water, and for the *Valiant* and Brant and the *Vixen*, while Ketterell became delirious as his temperature climbed higher and higher, and babbled about lovely women and blue-white devils who hung from the rafters of heaven by their tails; while the python slept and digested its suckling pig and heeded neither gods nor men, Crosby listened to the tireless beat of the tom-toms that seemed surely to be sounding the death knell of some one.

Of Tanner? Or Ketterell? Or both?

Or perhaps just of Brinsley, who was so hungry to live.

In the past thirty-six hours death had trifled with all of them, toyed with them, hummed to them, whispered invitingly in their ears; and now in the eery darkness of a *juju* worshipping hut that was shrouded in the eternal mangroves of the Niger Delta, death spoke to them with the dreary, funereal beat of drums.

Of course, if the time of waiting was too long—if he and Brinsley became desperate and ventured in pursuit of food . . .

"Howl, you idiots, howl!" Ketterell grunted, and stared straight up at Crosby without seeing him. "The moon's gone out on a fizzy drink spree and she won't be back till—how long does the moon stay drunk, Tanner?"

Crosby did not even pretend to

answer. Ketterell's temperature, if Crosby knew anything about temperatures, hung around 105°, and he was afraid the bad leg was getting worse by the minute. Rusty ten penny nails fired from a muzzle loader were bad stuff in a man's leg at any time, and when the leg was fifty miles from a doctor and the medicine kit was on a launch that had mysteriously disappeared . . .

KETTERELL'S voice suddenly lifted in a song—a croaking, scraping shadow of a normally good baritone:

"Oh, she was a miller's daughter,
And she lived down by the mill,
Blue was the color—blue was the color—

"Damn blue! It's a rotten color." The voice broke into a peevish whimper. "I don't like blue, Crosby! I don't like it! Those swine are blue—blue and white. Why don't you take them away? Away! Damn you, Crosby, can't a man have any peace!"

Ketterell's arms threshed and as Crosby gripped them to hold them quiet and reached for the demijohn to moisten Ketterell's lips once more, the whining voice of Brinsley took up another refrain.

"What are you going to do with him? Why don't you say what you are going to do with him? He's using up all the water and getting crazier by the minute, and between him and those damned drums out there, I'm going mad. Mad, I tell you!" A brief pause. "And you haven't given me a drink since—since—I don't remember when you gave me the last one and Ketterell's had at least three in an hour. What are you trying to do to me? Finish me so I won't talk? Hell, I'll talk, all right. If we ever get out of this—what—what are you going to do? Where are you going with that demijohn?"

Crosby had risen from his knees beside Ketterell who always appeared to quiet down as soon as Brinsley's voice got actively under way.

"Nowhere, Brinsley. Unfortunately, I'm going nowhere at all. I am just stretching my legs. That's permissible, isn't it?"

"Oh, don't be so funny. This is no time or place for your kind of humor, and if you hadn't been a ruddy fool and had let well enough alone, we wouldn't be in this hellish fix."

Crosby glanced at his wrist watch and learned that it was almost dinner time. The headquarters mess at Segwanga would be having their cocktails and Captain Lathrop, the senior military officer, would be enlarging upon the super-importance or something or other. Lathrop was always enlarging upon something, and of all the department heads Crosby would encounter if he ever got back to headquarters again, Lathrop promised the most uncomfortable half hour or so.

"Do you have to walk up and down like that?" Brinsley demanded. "And carry that ruddy demijohn about with you? Are you afraid I'll steal the damn thing?"

"Not at all. We are going to dine in about five minutes and I'm giving myself an appetite. Buck up, Brinsley. You still have your shirt; nobody has borrowed any of your liquor yet; and just think of being able to tell your grandchildren of the fifteen foot python that saved your life."

Brinsley, however, was in no humor to take any kind of joke. Fear and hate and his own very precise sense of the indignities the whole experience had imposed upon him, wrestled for possession within his slender frame. He was out of his element; far out. He was accustomed to doing his West African adventuring in white flannels, with a houseboy or a corps of Sierra Leonese clerks at his beck and call, and with a tennis court and the military barracks at all times visible from his desk at headquarters in Segwanga, or Warri, or wherever he happened to be keeping track of what the Southern Nigerian government was doing with its money.

Even the revolver which service regulations compelled him to carry was just

additional luggage to Brinsley; an imposition, in fact, because he had to pay duty on the weapon every time he brought it into the colony on his return from home leave.

"My grandchildren, eh? It's like your devilish cheek to be funny at my expense after getting me into this mess. Damn your hide!" Brinsley came sharply to his feet, his lean white face livid with passion. "Didn't you know Walla was on the loose? Didn't you know he was smuggling guns and slaves and all the rest of that rot? Didn't you order this expedition and lead Tanner into it with the promise of protection?

"And where are your Yoruba soldiermen? Where is the *Valiant?* Where is Loko, the engineer? Where is Brant and his machine guns? Damn you, where are they? Why should I lose my life because you are a fool or a hound, or both!"

Ketterell moaned, the tom-toms murmured a little louder and came still a little nearer, and the blackness beyond the window holes of the *juju* hut became just a little blacker.

Crosby put the demijohn down on the earthen floor and slowly wiped the sweating palm of his right hand on his trousers. He hadn't promised Tanner protection, but he knew now that, somehow or other, he should have brought Tanner out. Even if there hadn't been anything of Tanner to bring out. Because if he didn't try—if he didn't bring Tanner or what was left of him out of this mess, everybody was sure to say that he and Diana Tanner . . . Crosby turned sharply toward Ketterell, leaving the demijohn of water standing on the floor.

It was Ketterell Diana wanted. That was the joke of the whole miserable business. Ketterell. Ketterell, who was literally burning up and babbling now, in an undertone, about bridges and roads that were mixed up in his mind with poker and guns and blue-white devils—and women. Always women. Yet not once did he mention the name of *the* woman. Even in delirium Ketterell was too square to involve her in a mess like this.

However, Crosby knew, and his mouth was a thin white line and his eyes flinched at thought of what he knew Brinsley was going to say sooner or later. It was the kind of thing Brinsley, and Captain Lathrop, and Mrs. Markly and many others in the service, and out of it, would be likely to think and to say.

"WHY DON'T you speak, Crosby?" the whiningly vicious voice of Brinsley broke in. "Why don't you answer? You know you led Tanner into this with the promise of protection, and you know ruddy well why you didn't give him the protection you promised."

Brinsley laughed sneeringly—the hysterical laughter of a man who is so scared of one danger he is reckless of all else. He stood over the demijohn a moment or two, then stooped with a gesture of bravado, raised it to his lips and drank.

It was a long drink, much longer than he was entitled to, and when he lowered the demijohn it was too dark for him to notice that the moist palm of Crosby's right hand was nervously rubbing the butt of his revolver.

"Ever read the Bible, Crosby?" the sneering voice went on. "Eh? Ever heard of Uriah, the Hittite? And Bathsheba? And David who sent Uriah into the forefront of the battle? Eh, Crosby? Ever hear of that Scriptural classic? Or did you ever read Kipling's little poem about the man who was sent to Quetta?"

Another laugh and then a pause; a pause of just a second or two that was an eternity to Crosby, who jerked his hand away from his gun, kept his attention fixed on Ketterell and tried to concentrate on thoughts that had to do with fever and rusty ten penny nails, and the inconsequent mutterings of a man who was too sick to think of anything connected with the immediate present; particularly of the woman who really mattered.

"As a story, Crosby," the whining voice of Brinsley went on, while he hugged the demijohn in his arms as if he

were afraid Crosby would take it from him, "it's old stuff. I'll wager that even David of Israel wasn't your original model. And playing the hero and dragging Ketterell out at *my* expense isn't going to help a damned lot. You can understand that, can't you? Eh? You know what everybody's going to ask me. And now you know, damn you, what I'm going to tell them! Don't you? You're not such a ruddy fool that you can't see that far in front of your nose. Are you, Crosby?"

Again the voice paused and Brinsley took another drink; a short, nervous gulp that suggested he was just a little afraid that, under the existing circumstances, he had perhaps gone a little too far—shown his hand too soon.

Crosby knelt beside Ketterell, his hands clenching and unclenching on his thighs, the palms of them dripping with perspiration, his body as cold as the dull icy stare in his eyes.

Ketterell was the man Diana wanted. He must not forget that; and so far he had managed to bring Ketterell out. And if he succeeded in taking Ketterell back to her, and Ketterell and she made a go of it—that was it. That would solve everything. Ketterell and Diana. Of course. If Ketterell lived and Tanner died, Ketterell and Diana would give the lie to Brinsley and Lathrop and all the rest of them, and everybody would then know that he hadn't left Tanner behind because he wanted Diana for himself.

That was the solution. Certainly. If he got Ketterell out . . .

He waved a cloud of mosquitoes away from Ketterell's face. Where the devil was the *Valiant?* What had happened to Loko, the engineer? And why hadn't Brant and the Yoruba come up as he had ordered them to do— "in twenty-four hours unless you receive orders to the contrary?"

But he must get Ketterell out in any event. Must—somehow or other. And there was nothing he could have done for Tanner. Nothing. He knew that. Ketterell knew it. Tanner had been too badly hit, and Brinsley, in any case, hadn't hesitated long enough to see what had actually happened. Brinsley was just scared to death; hysterical, spiteful, viciously eager to place the blame on some one or other for his own discomfort and danger. But Ketterell knew. Ketterell understood. He was a gritty devil, too; had real stuff in him, and perhaps Diana would be able to make him settle down . . .

Crosby's clenched right hand was beating a tattoo upon his thigh as through the grime and sweat that streaked his face his eyes tried to smile.

"Funny you could play the hero, Crosby, and drag Ketterell out, while you left poor Tanner to those devils," Brinsley's voice resumed, just as if he were reading Crosby's mind. "Why did you do that? Why did you lead Tanner in without protection and then elect to drag Ketterell out? Eh? You owed more to Tanner, if only because he was a trader, and—"

A thunderous report and a flare of light that flashed across the window hole farthest away from Crosby seemed to tear the black and silent jungle world asunder. Brinsley's whining voice choked sharply and the demijohn slipped out of his arms and thudded to the floor.

Instantly the bush became alive with voices—with shrieking, scurrying life that raced hither and thither in a confusion of action that was like a blare of brass intruding into a measure that was supposed to be confined to first violins.

Even the python stirred and raised its head, and Crosby had come to his feet like a shot.

"What was that?" he demanded of no one in particular.

"Blasting," Ketterell murmured, and his head stopped rolling from side to side. "Who in hell's blasting with powder?"

The insanity in the blackness outside raced madly to the right, gathering volume as it went, and the dim, spectral length of the python began to uncoil inquiringly, in a lazy, sleepy sort of way.

"Wh—what's up now?" Brinsley whispered. "What are we going to do? What, in God's name, Crosby, are we going to do! Look! It—it's moving!"

Crosby listened and, gun in hand, kept a wary eye on the python which, after rearing itself terrifyingly, dropped slowly back again and calmly resumed its slumbers, apparently satisfied that the disturbance was not a personal matter.

"Stand over there," Crosby ordered Brinsley. "On the other side of Ketterell. Pick up the demijohn. There may be some water in it yet."

Brinsley picked up the demijohn and shook it.

"There is, Crosby. There is. You—you can have a drink. But—but what do you want me to stand there for?"

"You won't be in the way," Crosby said shortly. "Go on. Move! If anything's going to happen it's going to come in through the door and that window. Edge, you fool! Keep an eye on—"

Voices that climbed snarlingly out of the deeps of the Pit and appeared to act as a kind of catapult, suddenly hurled a dark, staggering figure through the doorway.

Brinsley screamed and stood transfixed, while Crosby's gun came up with a snap.

"Mas' Crosby! Mas' Commish'! Oh, my Gawd! Gawd! Gawd!"

"Loko!"

The black engineer of the *Valiant* drew a thick, sobbing breath and dropped at Crosby's feet, hugging the commissioner's knees.

"Dey done kill me! Dey done poison me! Don' let them kill me no mo'!"

CHAPTER III

THE GETAWAY

CROSBY sent two shots through the doorway and another through the window hole on the right. Brinsley heard the whine of the third bullet, and a scream that was followed a second or two later by a choking, gurgling cry told him that Crosby was not shooting merely for amusement.

Again the python raised its head inquiringly, and as the voices outside drifted to a safer distance, the lordly and sacred reptile slithered into the deeper shadows where it wrapped itself around an upright that rose from a platform, or dais, and reached through a hole in the roof.

Whether this pole had any definite religious significance or was intended merely for the accommodation of the python, Crosby did not know, but he supposed it found occasion sometimes to poke its head outdoors to study the situation or the scenery. And undoubtedly this could be considered an occasion.

Once more the monotone of the tom-toms took up their tireless, threatening refrain—a low, reverberant thunder that rolled in waves around the hut, advising Crosby that the circle was still complete.

"You drunken hound!" Brinsley came suddenly to life, beside himself with fear and passion, and strode toward Loko. "Where have you been? Where's the *Valiant?* Damn you! A bullet's too good—"

"Shut up," Crosby interrupted quietly. "And stand over there and keep an eye on Ketterell." His free hand went down to touch Loko's head to calm him, and encountered a welling smear of blood. "Loko! Are you badly hurt? Can't you talk?"

Loko grasped Crosby's knees a little tighter, then, reaching up, took firm hold of the commissioner's arms and pulled himself slowly to his feet.

"*Valiant* live—foh—creekside," he said thickly, hanging on to Crosby to steady himself. "We go dere. One time."

"Creekside? How far? Are you sure you can make it?"

"Not far. Jus' li'l bit. Maybe so if I catch li'l bit drink . . ."

"Drink!" Brinsley screamed. "You swine! Drinking or chasing women, I suppose, while I've been—"

"That's enough, Brinsley," Crosby broke in. "He's bleeding like a stuck

pig and can hardly stand on his feet. Let's have your flask."

"What!"

"And your shirt. Edge, Brinsley. This is no time to argue. This poor devil is hurt."

"My—*my* shirt! The devil, Crosby! Why, those ruddy mosquitoes—can't you feel them? Clouds and clouds of them! I'd be eaten alive and down with fever in no time. And—and my flask is almost empty. Why don't you just slosh him with this water and make the swine go to work?"

"Do you want me to take them away from you?" Crosby demanded in a stentorian voice, that acted as a screen for his desire to laugh out loud.

"But, damn it all, Crosby—"

"The shirt first and then the flask."

Brinsley gulped; Brinsley sputtered and whined and sniveled and looked upon Loko with venom and loathing. He even dared to show a glimpse of his hatred for Crosby. But he parted with his shirt for all that, almost a button at a time, and then with his flask.

"All right," Crosby said, and began tearing Brinsley's shirt into strips as if he got some real satisfaction out of the performance. "Now, keep an eye on that window and door and look out for the python."

"Wh—where is it? I don't see it."

"Over there in the dark. Look out for it."

Brinsley slapped at mosquitoes, fumbled with the butt of his revolver and glanced furtively into the blackest shadows of the hut for a sign of the great reptile.

"Why don't you let me fix him up while you keep watch for—for anything unusual?"

Crosby turned his head. He had finished tearing Brinsley's shirt and was just about to give Loko a drink of Brinsley's liquor.

"Do you know any more about first aid than you do about shooting?"

"Why, yes, Crosby. Of course. I was in the Territorials, you know—in the medical corps."

"Yes?"

"Why, surely. I never saw active service, but I learned how to bandage up the fellows who were supposed to be wounded in our sham fights." Brinsley came hurriedly forward. "Really, Crosby, it's perfectly all right. You keep watch and I'll fix him up nicely."

"Hunh." Crosby turned his attention dubiously to Loko again and offered him the flask. "Here, have a drink of this."

Loko drank very respectfully and very modestly.

"Yessah. Thank you, sah."

"Come on. Take a good drink. You need it."

"Yessah." Then, after a good long drink had gurgled down his throat, "Dat's pow'ful fine liquor, sah."

"Is it?" Crosby tilted the flask to his lips and drank. "So it is." He turned to Brinsley and held out the flask. "Something special, Brinsley? Why, what's wrong?"

"Confound you, Crosby! You let him drink out of my flask. Why the devil didn't you get a glass, or something?"

"Oh." Crosby matter-of-factly put the flask into his own hip pocket. "I'm sorry. Thoughtless of me, wasn't it? I'll have to get you another flask when we reach Segwanga." Then, with a sudden snap of command in his voice, "All right, get to work. He has a gash in his right shoulder and another in his head. *Machete* wounds probably. *Machetes*, Loko?"

"Yessah. Dey done cut me propah, sah."

"Evidently." Then to Brinsley, "Do the best you can for him—and go easy or you'll answer to me. *Savez?*"

"Those mosquitoes, Crosby. They'll—"

"Never mind the mosquitoes. Get to work."

WITH what grace he could muster, Brinsley accepted the remnants of his shirt and proceeded to bandage Loko's wounds in a manner that suggested that his experience in the medical corps of

the Territorials had not been in vain.

Loko, however, seemed restless and most uncertain of himself, and when the wound in his head had been attended to, he appeared to think the other in his shoulder too inconsequent to need attention.

"Why the devil don't you stand still?" Brinsley demanded of his patient nervously. "I can't help if if I hurt you a bit. I'm doing the best I can in the dark."

"Yessah, Mas' Brinsley. Thank you, sah."

"What's the matter, Loko?" Crosby asked. "Nervous?"

"We—we's got to make quick, sah. Yessah. We's got to catch dat *Valiant* one time."

"I know. But you can't go on bleeding like—"

Another thunderous explosion on the right drowned out the rest of what Crosby had to say, and again the screeching voices outside raced hither and yon until, as with one accord, they appeared to concentrate on the origin of the "blast."

"Dat—dat's it, sah," Loko whispered nervously. "We go now. One time."

"That's what?" Brinsley asked irritably. "What the deuce are you driving at?"

"We go now. One time," Loko repeated. "You finis' doctah palaver on the *Valiant*, sah."

"What does he mean, Crosby?" Brinsley asked impatiently. "Ask the fathead what he means. He's fidgeting like an idiot."

"Is that explosion a signal, Loko?" Crosby asked, with one eye on the python which, as nearly as he could judge, had mostly disappeared through the roof.

"We go now. One time," Loko repeated doggedly. Make plenty quick, sah."

"What the devil does he mean?" Brinsley asked again. "Are those devils trying to blow up the *Valiant?*"

"I don't know. But he seems to mean what he says, so let's make a start. Give me a lift with Ketterell and—"

"Help you carry him! I'll be damned if I do!"

"No, no. Just help me get him on my shoulder. Then you follow Loko and I'll try to follow you. Come on. Hang on to what's left of the sacrificial shirt and let's go."

"Confound your stupid humor, Crosby!"

"Come on! Edge! Help me get him up—that's it. No! Not that way! And go easy, you idiot. You're not handling a sack of potatoes. That's better." Crosby tried to make Ketterell as comfortable as possible, then nodded to Loko who was eyeing him with something of the devotion of a faithful dog. "All right, Loko. Make quick. One time."

"Yessah. Sof'ly, sof'ly, sah."

Loko led the way and Brinsley diffidently followed. Crosby took a backward glance in the direction of the python, smiled a fleeting, grimy smile of thanks and ducked with his burden through the low doorway into the open.

If he could put Ketterell aboard the *Valiant* and keep him alive until they reached a doctor, everything would be all right. Everything. Particularly after Ketterell and Diana met . . .

They dipped suddenly into a path that Crosby would not have seen had Loko not led them into it; a path so densely crowded with vegetation that it seemed to smother all sound—even the sound of the tom-toms that throbbed like an agitated pulse after the shock of the second explosion.

And apparently Loko knew exactly what he was doing and precisely when to do it. For he did not hesitate a moment, and the pace he set, in spite of his staggering, uncertain gait, plainly indicated that time was the most important factor to be reckoned with.

The screeching voices of Walla's followers leaped into life, here and there, in a kind of staccato surprise and confusion; but there was little or no organization in the sound of them. They were everywhere except in the path that Loko followed, and just as this path suddenly

widened and dipped down to the waterfront, a third and most unusual explosion roared and flared with such a sharp and spiteful crackle that Crosby had the notion, when he was able to think at all, that dynamite had taken the place of gunpowder.

Loko, staggering on ahead, rocked dizzily and came to his knees; and Brinsley, a foot or two behind the engineer, sprawled on top of him. Crosby managed to keep his feet, swaying dangerously, while off to the right a red mouth opened and spat the shattered wrecks of many things toward the black roof of the night.

The echo was a bedlam of voices and a cracking rain of débris that, for several gasping seconds, seemed likely to be more dangerous and indiscriminating than the explosion. Then, squeakingly ejecting itself into the chorus, was Brinsley's voice:

"You stupid swine! Why the devil don't you watch where you are going?"

Loko did not answer this. He was dizzy, sick and literally gray with a fear that was strictly his own private affair. But when Brinsley had regained his feet and Loko had come lurchingly upward to sway upon very unsteady legs, he knew he had succeeded in doing the very dangerous thing he had set out to do.

The *Valiant* was still intact. The low purr of her engines, though rather thick and coughing at times, was still sounding behind the tangle of creepers that screened her from other men's eyes, and in a few minutes more they would be safe.

"Where is she?" Brinsely demanded hoarsely. "Where is that damned launch?"

Loko paused and listened, moved forward a few steps and listened again.

A low cry, like a moan of mortal agony, came out of the thick brush on the right; from the place that Loko knew the *Valiant* was waiting.

"What's that?" Brinsley whispered. "What in heaven's name is that?"

"Be all right," Loko said in a low monotone. "*Valiant* be all right. We go. One time."

And in something less than a minute he showed both Crosby and Brinsley that he meant it.

The way to Goba and Brant and the *Vixen* was closed. But, in a very few minutes more, the *Valiant* was poking her nose into the black waters of Oagbi's creek, slinking, by a circuitous route, toward Segwanga.

CHAPTER IV

NANDA

LOKO headed north. It was the only direction leading away from Walla's town that offered a chance of safety and, for awhile, Oagbi's creek seemed to be choked with canoes.

They were not, as Loko appeared to be aware, hostile canoes. They were canoes that, like the launch, were using the one available artery to escape from a troubled area before real trouble began.

For this was but the third night of the *juju* "play" that had so suddenly and unexpectedly developed into open and vicious rebellion against law and order; and the succeeding days and nights, waxing in fury and fanaticism, were likely to draw into that vortex every one who did not make an effort to avoid the ever widening swirl of the maelstrom soon enough.

Then, while madness and disaster shrieked in the *Valiant's* wake; while Loko hung dizzily on to the wheel and demonstrated that he knew exactly what he was doing and why; while the launch cut her way clear of the pack of canoes and swung around the Nogalla curve into broader, clearer water; while the beat of the tom-toms died down to a whisper that finally faded out altogether, Crosby eyed Loko with a suspicious and questioning eye—and made several interesting discoveries at the same time.

Loko's performance, from the moment he had appeared in the *juju* hut, had a flavor of exactitude and foreknowledge that was directly opposite to what had happened to him in the previous thirty-

six hours. Because, as Crosby discovered, the launch had been raided and depleted of everything worth carrying away, including all of their personal belongings and the medicine kit.

A few tins of corned beef, another of tea biscuits and a small quantity of tea had been left behind—or, as Crosby was inclined to suspect, had been brought on board by some one or other after the raid was over.

The launch, too, was pretty badly battered, not any too watertight, and her engines had developed a cough that made Segwanga seem a long way off, particularly while the tom-toms were still throbbing in Crosby's ears.

Loko's story was not very coherent. He said he had become suddenly very sick after eating some ground nut soup, and did not really know what had happened after that until he woke up and found the *Valiant* aground on a sandbank. Apparently a day and a night had elapsed in the interval and unquestionably Loko had been a very sick man.

However, at high tide the launch had floated off the sandbank and, learning where Crosby and the others were besieged, he had brought the launch around under cover of the dark to try to help them.

It was at this point that Loko's story faltered. Quite obviously he omitted several very salient facts necessary to make it a reasonable and convincing narrative.

"Confounded liar!" Brinsley had said in the comparative safety and comfort of the *Valiant's* little cabin, and after a meal of corned beef and tea at which he had grumbled because there wasn't any mustard or bread and butter. "He got drunk with some woman or other and let those devils get away with our chop and our duds. Damn him! And I gave him my shirt to—"

"And your flask, Brinsley," Crosby interjected mildly. "Don't forget your flask."

"Really! More humor? It isn't enough I suppose, that my nerves are worn to a ragged edge and that I'm being eaten alive by those ruddy mosquitoes!"

"There's nothing the matter with your nerves, Brinsley," Crosby said almost gently. "Your nerves are all right. It's your *nerve* that's gone—if you can assimilate the subtle distinction and difference. Inside of twenty-four hours you'll be strutting around Segwanga with a new sun helmet and a clean shirt just as if nothing had happened."

"Nothing would have happened if you hadn't been a ruddy fool! As it is, I'll have to apply for sick leave—and you know how I hate to go home to that damned English winter."

CROSBY said no more. He was seated on a camp chair beside Ketterell, who lay on a bench whispering impossible profanities, quoting Omar Khayyam, and calling women by their first names as if each name were the name of the only woman he had ever known, and never repeating the same name twice. Occasionally, because Crosby happened to know several of the ladies to whom Ketterell so softly referred, he felt guilty of eavesdropping.

Yet not once did Ketterell speak of Diana.

Crosby wondered about this as he absently studied a bullet hole in the crown of his sun helmet. Ketterell couldn't possibly know that he was not mentioning Diana's name. He could not really be controlling the matter. He was too sick for that—so sick that Crosby was afraid.

"Why the devil did you leave Brant at Goba?" Brinsely's whining symphony began again. "You know ruddy well you promised Tanner protection. And yet you leave Brant at Goba and lead Tanner in and leave him there! I'm not speaking for myself. I'm in the service and I take my medicine without whining. But Tanner was different. Tanner was a trader—our guest—brought along to represent trade in general and the white trading beaches of Segwanga in particular. And you deny him the protection

you promised, see him shot down, don't do a damn thing to help him and then risk all our lives dragging that damned fool out."

Brinsley paused to slap viciously at the mosquitoes that seemed to like him so much and then:

"Why are you so worried about him? You've been as careful of his ruddy hide as if it were twenty-two carat gold, and you were afraid the poor little dear would get scratched. What's he ever done for you? What thanks do you think you'll get for—"

The whining voice stopped sharply as the life in the *Valiant's* engines sputtered chokingly and died.

"What the devil's happened? What's wrong now? Can't that fool keep this launch going for a mile or two without—"

"Shut up!" Crosby snapped and came instantly to his feet, welcoming the interruption to Brinsley's whine. "Keep an eye on Ketterell and see that he doesn't fall off that bench. I'm going out to see what the trouble is."

He strode abruptly out of the little cabin and passed up on deck, then moved cautiously toward the wheel where he expected to find the black engineer moaning over an engine that, among other things, had a defective feed pipe.

But there was neither sign nor sound of Loko in the first minute or two, and Crosby was just about to call out to him when he almost stumbled over the engineer who lay in a huddled heap on deck, his face turned toward the cabin companion.

"Loko!" Crosby whispered and bent over him.

There was no answer and when Crosby touched the engineer's shoulder he found that it was wet and sticky.

"Caved in, poor devil," he muttered, realizing that the *machete* wounds in Loko's shoulder and head had started bleeding afresh and that the engineer had probably stopped the launch when he knew the wheel was slipping out of his hands.

Crosby stooped, heaved the unconscious engineer on to his shoulder then staggered with him toward the cabin. Entering the cabin he moved straight toward Brinsley.

"What in—!"

"Give me a hand," Crosby said bruskly. "He's out cold. Let's put him on that bench and— Come on—get up! We can't lie around here all night."

"But, damn it all, Crosby—"

"Get up and shut up! Your job from now on is to take care of Loko and Ketterell while I try to steer the launch and get us somewhere."

"But—but you'll get lost! You don't know anything about these — these creeks."

"I know it," Crosby conceded dryly, making Loko comfortable on the bench Brinsley had vacated. "But I'd rather be moving than lying around here. Stop that bleeding, if you can, and shut up."

"The swine's shamming!" Brinsley whimpered. "He just wants to chuck his job."

"If you were cut up as he is, you'd — Oh, what's the use!" Crosby turned sharply toward the cabin companion. "Take care of them or I'll leave you on a sandbank for a croc's breakfast."

"You—my God, Crosby! You wouldn't really do a thing like that?"

The rear view of Crosby as he left the cabin and passed out on deck suggested that it was just possible that he would like to see a crocodile enjoy Brinsley for breakfast.

Presently, however, the coughing chug of the *Valiant's* engines sounded again and the crippled, leaking launch was once more thrusting her nose into the murky waters of Oagbi's Creek.

Between Crosby and the government wharf at Segwanga lay an inextricable maze of waterways, a jumble of mangrove bound creeks that reached blackly into every hole and corner of the Niger Delta; and nothing was simpler, even for the initiated, than to go astray.

Crosby was well aware of this and once, within his experience and in broad daylight, the skipper of a sternwheeler, with the provincial commissioner on board,

had found himself heading for Warri when he was supposed to be steaming for Sapeli, which lay in the opposite direction.

Crosby was thinking of this now, and found that the incident was not nearly so humorous as it had been at the time when nothing more than the provincial commissioner's temper had been at stake. Peering into the blackness ahead and only vaguely aware of the route he should follow, Crosby knew he was trusting principally to luck, and tried not to think at all.

EVERY now and then the ghostly shape of a passing trade canoe loomed out of the dark, and the swish of paddles sounded like spectral whisperings as the canoe slipped past under the shadow of the overhanging mangroves. Then, for many minutes, the coughing voice of the *Valiant's* engines was the only sound in Crosby's ears; a sound that became as monotonous as the incessant night voices of the bush, and even less noticeable.

Then, with the whining voice of Brinsley also momentarily stilled, Crosby found his own thoughts crowding the silence with a raucous clamor that was louder even than the screechings of old Walla's followers.

Where were Brant and the company of Yoruba? Why hadn't Brant followed instructions? What had really happened to Loko and the launch, and why had Tanner, in that moment when he had been hit, thought he had been tricked? Tanner, who had led him, Crosby, to believe that old Walla was itching for the sight of blood and that a peaceful gesture, backed secretly by a company of Yoruba and a machine gun or two, might be advisable to avoid the spread of a serious insurrection?

Who had warned Walla—if he had been warned—that the peaceful gesture was not quite so helpless as it seemed? And why had Walla, with not a khaki clad Yoruba in sight, opened fire upon a well nigh defenseless party of white men who were attended only by a few houseboys and a string of Kroo boy carriers?

Heaven only knew what had happened to the houseboys and carriers after that first fusillade; but they had probably been cut down as they fled madly along unfamiliar bush paths that were sown with Walla's chalked up devils, armed with *machetes*, spears, ancient muzzle loaders and a few suspicious looking Winchesters.

Then there had been that particularly ticklish moment at the fork of several paths, when Brinsley's houseboy had plunged wildly ahead along the wrong path—the path that had not led to the *juju* worshipping hut and sanctuary.

Crosby thought about this moment very seriously. He wondered why Brinsley and not the houseboy had been lucky enough to choose this one safe path among so many that were not safe, particularly if Brinsley lived to talk as much as he undoubtedly would talk if he had a chance. Because, in this event, the path to the *juju* worshipping hut was likely to become the path to disaster, not only to Crosby himself but also to—

Bathsheba!

Crosby winced in the darkness and his mouth tightened and twisted curiously.

It was the kind of thing Brinsley and others of his ilk would like to think, even if the parallel were not a particularly good one. Because, whereas David of Israel had sent Uriah the Hittite into "the forefront of the battle" where Uriah would have an excellent chance of being killed, and David had remained at home to make love to Bathsheba, Uriah's wife . . .

"The damned rotter!" Crosby muttered, and he was not referring to David, King of Israel, but to Brinsley, who was already stretching several points in his story to make Tanner fit the rôle of Uriah, while he, Crosby, was evidently to be cast for the part of David. Bathsheba, of course, was Diana Tanner.

"The filthy little swine!"

Crosby stared straight into the darkness ahead, his eyes burning with a dull fire that flamed and sank and flamed again, then went out altogether as a sud-

den, involuntary laugh dissolved his anger in a moment.

Apparently Ketterell did not fit into Brinsley's conception of things at all! And this, of course, was very funny. The funniest thing in the whole silly business. Crosby knew only too well how funny it was, and he liked to think that the joke would be on Brinsley even if everybody knew that he, Crosby, was in love with Tanner's wife, just as surely as everybody knew that Tanner's wife was not in love with Tanner and never had been. Brinsley's story would fall apart completely if Ketterell and Diana—

"You no *savez* propah creek, sah?"

"What the devil—!"

"I no' be debbil, sah, I be Nanda. I be good girl, sah, long time."

CHAPTER V

JUNGLE FLIGHT

CROSBY stared at the girl in frank amazement.

"Where the dickens did you come from?"

"I no *savez*, sah," Nanda said respectfully; and with a habitual gesture that was naively immodest, tightened the twist knot in the piece of Madras that covered her so intimately from armpit to heel. "You go foh Segwanga, sah?"

Crosby did not answer this. He looked the girl over and slackened the speed of the launch to do it; saw that she was the lithe, comely type of native girl—probably a Jakri—and vaguely remembered having seen her before somewhere; either around his office door at government headquarters in Segwanga, or upon one or other of the trading beaches there—probably Tanner's.

"How did you get aboard?" he asked presently, and tried to keep the launch's nose pointing straight ahead.

"I be Nanda, sah," the girl said very simply—too simply, Crosby thought. "I come foh Warri, sah, and I *savez* you be propah commish' long time."

Crosby inclined his head gravely. Evidently the girl knew who and what he was and had no fear of putting herself and her safety into the hands of a district commissioner.

"How you come aboard?" he asked. "And which time?"

"Walla town be bad town for good Jakri girl, sah, so I come foh dis gov'ment launch. Gov'ment man be good man. I no fear gov'ment man. Gov'ment man no flog good Jakri girl."

"When did you come aboard?" Crosby persisted.

Nanda looked mildly into the blackness of the creek ahead, adjusted the silk handkerchief that was wound about her head so that it achieved a less disturbed and less rakish angle, then announced calmly—

"You no go catch Segwanga foh dis creek, sah."

"What!"

Nanda repeated that he was following the wrong creek if he were bound for Segwanga, and added that he should have turned out of Oagbi's creek about half a mile back.

"You mean— How do I know you're not lying?"

"I no *savez* lie, sah," Nanda said. "Lie palaver be bad girl palaver. I be good Jakri girl long time, sah."

"Hunh." Crosby considered this and stopped the launch to give him a chance to study the situation and the girl more closely. "Which time you come aboard?"

"Dem time eng'neer catch sick, sah."

"Sick!"

"Yessah. Eng'neer sick too much, sah. He sick pass one day."

"Not drunk?"

"No, sah. He sick, sah. He sick foh him belly and him head. He sick too much, sah. I think so be chop palaver."

"You mean somebody doctored his chop?"

"Maybe so Walla boy fixum chop, sah, so he catch sick. But I no *savez* dat foh true, sah."

"Hunh," Crosby grunted and had an encouraging sense of relief because Loko had been exonerated from a very serious

charge. However, his experience as a district commissioner told him the girl would tell only what she wanted to tell and that she would blandly lie her way out of committing herself to anything that really mattered.

Just what she had been doing in Walla town at a time when the place was in no humor to welcome strangers, and why she had come aboard the launch at all, since the launch, under the circumstances, was a much less secure means of transportation to Segwanga than the most trifling of canoes would have been, was not in the least obvious.

And if she actually had come aboard when Loko had been sick, she must have accompanied him around to the *juju* hut. Loko had said nothing about her; given not the slightest hint that he knew of her presence on board the launch at any time; and while Loko was not in the best of shape to be very coherent about anything, even a sick stomach and two nasty *machete* wounds were not enough to make him overlook a girl like Nanda.

Nanda, Crosby was afraid, was that kind of girl.

"Loko be your friend?" he asked mildly.

"No, sah. I look him foh gov'ment beach wharf some time, dat's all."

"What's matter you no catch canoe to Segwanga?"

"No man give me canoe. All Walla man flog me. Be so I come foh gov'ment launch. Gov'ment man be good. He no flog Jakri girl. Be so my father say all time."

Crosby smiled slightly, started the launch again and carefully swung her around to look for the creek Nanda said he had missed.

"Be good," the girl approved.

"Yes? I hope it is." Crosby straightened the launch out and headed cautiously back the way he had come. "Which man be your father?"

"I be daughter for Chief Lori Egba, sah."

"What!"

"Yessah."

"Lori Egba of Warri?"

"Yessah."

Crosby looked at the girl now in still greater amazement, and almost bowed respectfully in acknowledgment of the introduction.

One of Lori Egba's daughters!

If she had said she was a Romanoff princess masquerading in a blackface part, Crosby could not have been more surprised. For the name of Lori Egba was almost a fetish among white men in the Warri and Benin River districts of the lower Niger—particularly white men in the service of the government.

IT WAS a name that made even the most irascible of them, in their sourest and most difficult moments, concede that, after all, there was one Jakri who made the sweltering, fever ridden grind of government on the old Slave Coast give promise of being worth the trouble. And when Crosby had been stationed at Warri, he had been thankful on several dubious and ticklish occasions that he numbered Chief Lori Egba among his best and sincerest friends.

Therefore, when he had recovered somewhat from his amazement, he looked upon Nanda with a new and hopeful interest, wondering at the same time how a daughter of Lori Egba's had come to get herself into such a situation at such a time. He knew the girl would not be in the least likely to tell him about it, unless she happened to find it convenient to do so, and Loko's reticence on the subject of her presence on board the launch suddenly took on a very plausible significance.

Loko was part Jakri, part Lagos-man and, in a case of the kind, he would say or do nothing that would incriminate the daughter of so great a chief among his mother's people.

"Lori Egba *savez* you come foh Walla town at this time?" Crosby asked presently.

"No, sah,"—very quietly.

"No? What's matter? You run 'way?"

"No, sah. I no look my father long time."

"Hunh." Crosby paused dubiously. "You catch husband?"

"No, sah."

"Fine girl like you no catch husband!" Crosby exclaimed and smiled. "Maybe your father make marriage price too high?"

Nanda did not smile. Crosby's implied compliment, which was probably stereotyped enough to Nanda, had apparently struck the wrong note—so much so that the girl showed quite plainly, even in the dark, that she was in no humor for compliments of the sort.

She turned her face toward the ever following bank of mangroves and swung sharply toward the rail; just a few restless, cat-like steps that were enough to reveal the lithe perfections of her tightly clad body and the silent swiftness with which she could get into action when the occasion demanded it. Then, in a moment, she spun toward Crosby with disconcerting suddenness.

"You want catch Segwanga plenty quick?"

"Why—er—of course."

"And you no *savez* propah creek?"

"Well, no; not exactly."

"And Mas' Kett'rell sick? He catch plenty fever?"

Crosby looked startled, and before he could answer the girl demanded again, as if her patience with all delays was exhausted—"He no catch plenty fever?"

"Yes. Ketterell is very sick," Crosby conceded.

Nanda nodded.

"And you want catch Segwanga plenty quick?"

"The quicker the better."

"All righ'. Nanda go show you."

"Thank you. That's very nice of you. But—"

"Be all righ'. Nanda go show you. Nanda speak true mouth all time. *Savez?*"

Crosby smiled slightly and swung the launch carefully into the mouth of the creek he had missed.

"Is this the creek?"

"Be him," Nanda said. "Sof'ly, sof'ly foh dis place. Plenty sandbank live."

So Crosby went "sof'ly, sof'ly" and hoped to heaven he would not hit one of the sandbanks the girl said were so numerous. The new creek, whatever its name, was narrower, darker and more forbidding than usual. The mangroves crowded in upon them on either side and the deep water channel did not appear to be much wider than a bush path—certainly not wide enough to accommodate a launch like the *Valiant.*

Every few seconds Crosby glanced at Nanda and tried to find comfort in the thought that she was a daughter of Lori Egba.

"Are you sure this is—"

The launch shivered from stem to stern —shivered and scraped, then seemed to shudder free of the treacherous, shifting sand as Crosby desperately swung her nose into what he hoped was deeper water.

"Be all righ'," Nanda assured him. "Sandback done pass. Maybe so dat be hippo. Plenty hippo live foh dis creek some time."

Crosby said nothing. He was not sure that he preferred a herd of hippos to sandbanks, particularly in such narrow quarters, but he gave the launch more speed and hoped that Nanda was right about the sandbanks.

A sudden, furious commotion in the water upon either side of him was his immediate answer. Vague, cumbersome shapes appeared to climb out of nether darkness and plunge hither and yon, crashing headlong into the mangrove walls of the creek with a rapid-fire succession of bellowing grunts that filled the narrow little waterway with a hoarse, pig-like thunder.

Crosby hung on to the wheel, held his breath while Nanda muttered to herself—possibly a prayer to her water gods.

Then, as the *Valiant's* bows hewed a path through pandemonium, it was as if the disturbed and departing herd of hippos had pushed back the mangroves,

so that Crosby had the sudden impression of having the closed doors of a lake thrown open to him.

"Be good!" Nanda assured him again with a decided note of relief in her voice. "Plenty water live. Make quick. We go catch Segwanga morning time."

"Not in this launch, we don't," Crosby growled, and listened for the thick, coughing chug of the *Valiant's* engine to rise above the thunder in her wake. "Engine no good."

"Be good," Nanda persisted. "Morning time we go catch Segwanga. *Savez?*"

It sounded more like an order or a threat than a simple, optimistic promise; as if Nanda had a very particular reason for wanting to reach Segwanga by morning time.

"Launch engine catch sick," Crosby said again, to see if the information would bother her to any extent. "No fit to make quick. Sof'ly, sof'ly—slow-slow—all time. We go catch Segwanga, maybe so, tomorrow night time."

"No! Morning time! Tomorrow night time be—"

Nanda stopped there as if she had been on the verge of talking too much, and had realized it just in time. She wheeled away from Crosby a step or two, and her hand went nervously up to the silk handkerchief about her head; and when she fumblingly loosened the knot and tied it again, she turned her face sharply toward the cabin. Every inch of her slim, supple body was poised for action.

"Tomorrow night time be all right," Crosby said deliberately. "Sof'ly, sof'ly—slow-slow."

"*Cha!*" Nanda swung upon him and her eyes seemed to leap at him out of the dark. A crackling stream of Jakri gutturals exploded about his head. And then, "You be fool! You be small boy! You be old, old man! You sick foh your head! Your teeth done go 'way all same old, old woman! Your hand done die! You—you— *cha!* You be commish'—you be big gov'ment commish' and you talk sof'ly, sof'ly—slow-slow—when all man—when all man—"

Evidently Nanda could find no more words to express her contempt for Crosby as a man and a commissioner; or else she was afraid she had already said too much. But her eyes added all that was necessary; her eyes and the almost violent demand for speed that was in the movement of her hands. Crosby was sure that, if she had dared, she would have snatched the wheel away from him. Instead she looked in baffled rage toward the cabin.

Loko? Had Loko promised her that they would reach Segwanga in the morning?

Crosby increased the launch's speed a little, then a little more, and still a little more till the *Valiant* was flinging respectable white fans of spray from her bows—almost as high and wide as usual.

Nanda stopped looking toward the cabin and sidled nearer to Crosby; nearer and nearer yet.

"Morning time?" she whispered at last. "Morning time? We go catch Segwanga morning time?"

There was a hungry, almost fawning appeal in her voice. Anger and despair had gone out and a kind of shivering, unbelievable hope had come in.

Crosby gave the *Valiant* her head; almost as much as she could take. The launch leaped and Nanda whined; a low, involuntary cry of savage ecstasy that made Crosby's eyes widen sharply.

Quite evidently the girl had important business in Segwanga in the morning.

CHAPTER VI

THE OFFICIAL FAMILY

THE *VALIANT* limped alongside the government beach wharf shortly after ten o'clock next morning. She had made better time than Crosby had hoped for even in his most sanguine moments, and though Nanda had chosen short cuts that had given him some very anxious minutes dodging sandbanks and shallow water, he had been conscious of having been under a decided obligation to the girl when Loko had taken

over the wheel to allow him to get some breakfast.

Evidently Brinsley's experience in the medical corps of the Territorials had not been altogether thrown away. His bandages on Loko's head and shoulder had stayed on and, after a few hours' rest, Loko had sufficiently recovered to make some tea and to open another of the cans of corned beef.

However, Loko was apparently still too weak or too much concerned about his misfortunes to give the existence of Nanda the slightest acknowledgment. At least this was the impression Crosby had received when Loko appeared to take charge of the wheel. Even another drink of Brinsley's liquor had not induced the engineer to notice that Nanda was on deck.

Nanda had paid just as little heed to Loko. Squatting on a little pile of tarpaulin, she had rested her forehead on her knees, wrapped her arms about her head, and apparently had gone to sleep. She had said she was not hungry or thirsty. She wanted nothing; nothing except to reach Segwanga as quickly as possible.

Thus, Crosby had left them and now, as the launch scraped alongside the government wharf, he was again sitting on the camp chair beside Ketterell's improvised couch, watching Ketterell's pallid, motionless lips, while he vaguely listened to the sound of voices on the wharf and still more vaguely to Brinsley who was inviting him to see what the mosquitoes and sandflies had done to him in the small hours of the night.

"How the devil am I going to go up the beach looking like this?" he demanded as if he expected Crosby to solve the problem for him.

Crosby did not bother to answer. He was waiting for Ketterell's lips to move again, because they had not moved or emitted a sound of any sort since he had come back into the cabin.

Brinsley did not know when Ketterell had stopped muttering to himself. He did not even know that Nanda was on board the launch and that she had guided them to safety throughout the night. He had not left the cabin for a moment and he knew they had reached their destination only because he had recognized the flag pole on Marsden & Company's trading beach through a porthole.

"Markly's wife or some of the other women are sure to be hanging around the wharf," he went on in his most familiar tone. "They're bound to have spotted the launch coming upriver and everybody's going to be on the wharf to find out what the deuce has happened. What are we going to tell all those people? What are we going to do? Everybody's going to ask a million questions and, damn it all, Crosby, I can't go up the beach without a shirt, all bitten up like this!"

Crosby recognized some of the voices on the wharf—white voices and black. Markly's voice; Denby's; the voice of a woman—Nurse Raymond, possibly—and the thick tones of Molba, the Kroo boy chief steward of the headquarters mess. Molba was excitedly seeking news of his brother, and possibly several cousins; and Brinsley's voice battled for supremacy over these voices with a plaintive, bird-like chirp.

"Just look at me, Crosby! I'm a rotten looking mess. If I don't get some quinine, I'll be down with fever before dinner!"

Markly—Captain Markly R.N.R. of the transport department to be precise—was asking Loko very audibly and imperatively what the devil had happened to him and to the launch. What Loko answered Crosby did not catch.

"Besides, I'll have to get a sun helmet," Brinsley went on. "I lost mine, you know, and I can't risk the sun without one. Will you send some one for a houseboy and have him bring me a sun helmet and a shirt?"

Crosby rose from the camp chair. His own sun helmet was tilted on the back of his head and the neat bullet hole through the crown of it was plainly visible. The shirt that had gone to bandage Ketterell's leg had also been peppered in several

places. Just why none of these bullets that had come so near had not made so much as a scratch . . .

The launch bumped the wharf piles sharply and Ketterell rolled perilously on his bench. Crosby sprang toward him to prevent him rolling to the floor and Ketterell's lips moved to form a single word that was just a breath.

"Diana?"

Crosby was not sure. He glanced quickly at Brinsley to see if he had heard. But Brinsley was too intent upon the appearance of his shirtless arms and shoulders to think about anything else. So Crosby sat down again to wait till he was sure the launch was securely tied up.

"I thought you were going out to get me a houseboy?" Brinsley began at once. "Didn't you say you would?"

The rolling figure of Captain Markly appeared in the cabin companion.

"Hello, Crosby. What the devil's up? What have you done to my launch and my engineer? And where are all your boys and carriers?"

"A devil of a mess, Markly," Brinsley broke in. "A perfect devil of a mess. Everything went wrong just as I supposed it would, and old Walla shot us all to little bits. Tanner's gone. Ketterell's full of rusty nails and running a devilish temperature, and all our boys got shot or scattered—heaven knows where. The launch was raided and almost blown up because that fathead engineer of yours got drunk and—"

"Drunk!"

"Send one of your sailors for a stretcher, will you?" Crosby said simply. "And get hold of Doc Graham at once wherever he is. Hurry, Markly. Ketterell's in a very bad way."

MARKLY'S naturally florid color paled considerably, but he was accustomed to emergencies, and also to Brinsley. So he was gone from the cabin in a twinkling and orders snapped on the wharf in the succeeding few seconds like the crackling of a whip.

Presently Crosby followed Markly out on deck and was in time to see one of the colored sailors in the transport department departing on a headlong run along a palm lined path that led to several trading beaches upriver.

"Hello, Crosby. Run into a bit of trouble?"

The voice of Denby, the lanky police commissioner, drawled down at him from the wharf end. Beside Denby, as usual, was Nurse Raymond, and to the right of the nurse was the eagle eyed Mrs. Markly and an engineer of the public works department—the department of which Ketterell, in Segwanga, was the official head.

There were other faces, official and otherwise, black mixed with white, all of them trying to crowd the wharf end; but Crosby's eyes came away from the blur of them and glanced around the deck of the launch. There was no sign of Nanda. Either the girl had slipped overboard or was making a very good job of concealing herself from Mrs. Markly's all seeing eyes.

Loko was seated beside the wheel with his head cupped in his hands. He was tired, sick and afraid—and looked it. Crosby moved to his side and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"It's all right, Loko. No trouble come. Better go up to hospital one time."

Loko looked up, seemed as if he would speak, then glanced hurriedly up at the faces on the wharf.

"Y-yessah. I sick foh my haid too much, sah. I go hospital one time."

He came wearily to his feet, passed up on to the wharf, then disappeared in the general direction of the little hospital that lay behind the headquarters building and opposite the barracks. Crosby's eyes, however, did not follow Loko. They traveled along the path taken by the sailor who had gone to the upriver trading beaches in obedience to one of Markly's orders. Evidently Doctor Graham was making his rounds in that direction, possibly because some one was sick at Barlow's beach. Or Tanner's?

"Anything I can do, Mr. Crosby, till

the doctor comes?" Nurse Raymond called down to him. "Or is it a hospital case?"

Crosby smiled up at the voice in a mechanical fashion.

"I'm afraid so. Thanks, just the same. Is Miss Dawson on duty just now?"

"Yes. I go on again at noon."

Crosby nodded and heard Mrs. Markly demand who was going to the hospital, but he elected to ignore all such pertinent inquiries, and said to no one in particular:

"Brinsley wants a house boy. Is there —oh, yes, Molba. Mas' Brinsley live for launch cabin. He wants houseboy one time. Better go look him."

Molba—squat, broad shouldered, cow eyed—ignored the little gangway and jumped down from the wharf to the deck of the launch, still looking about him for familiar faces—Jakri and Kroo—then approach Crosby with a puzzled bewilderment in his eyes.

"My brother? And Dabla? And Coffee? And Beeli? And—and all man? Which place they live?"

Crosby bit his lip, looked out across the water, then around and up at Denby and Nurse Raymond and the Marklys and the rest and found Molba's questions echoing in their eyes. So he looked beyond them and caught sight of the tall, impressive military figure of Captain Lathrop coming striding down the wharf through a press of native hangers-on that was thinly interspersed with colored Sierra Leonese clerks, blue clad policemen, a few Yoruba in khaki, a smattering of whites—and Nanda.

The carmine silk handkerchief about her head would have been a target for any eye; but, for all that, Crosby might not have seen Nanda at all if he had not been attracted to the approach of Lathrop, who was the senior military officer in Segwanga—the missing Captain Brant's immediate superior.

Lathrop had been coming down the wharf in a great hurry, brushing everyone aside and ignoring everybody who might have greeted and delayed him. Then suddenly he stopped; and just as suddenly Crosby saw Nanda.

Lathrop had stopped to speak to her—stopped just a second or two—then came on again.

And the carmine silk handkerchief slipped away into the background as mysteriously as Nanda herself had appeared at Crosby's elbow in the pitch blackness of Oagbi's creek.

Crosby's eyes were clouded as he glanced down at Molba, who was still waiting for an answer to his questions.

"Better go look Mas' Brinsley," he said quietly. "He want houseboy one time."

"Yessah."

Molba's flat naked feet scuffed the deck slowly and dubiously in the direction of the *Valiant's* cabin, and Crosby looked up at the wharf end to find Captain Lathrop's decided gray eyes looking down. Just then Mrs. Markly asked suddenly:

"What made that terrible hole in your sun helmet, Mr. Crosby? Was it a bullet?"

Captain Markly nudged his wife's elbow and the P. W. D. engineer on the other side of her involuntarily muttered a quite audible "Sh-h!" in her ear. Crosby did not even turn his head. He was looking up at Lathrop and wondering what the senior military officer in Segwanga had to do with Nanda, who had been in Wallatown at a most inopportune moment.

"Hello, Crosby," Lathrop said matter-of-factly. "You wanted to see me, didn't you?"

Crosby nodded.

"Let's go up to my rooms." Then to Markly quietly, "Better clear the wharf and avoid any fuss, and as soon as the stretcher arrives, have Ketterell removed as quickly as possible." He moved toward the little gangway and his eyes shifted to Denby as he climbed to the wharf. "Want to come up and have a drink after I've washed up? In about half an hour?"

"Surely. Anything I can do in the meantime?"

Crosby reached the wharf with the

doubtfully questioning and critical eyes of Segwanga upon him, and through the grime on his face and the look of weariness in his eyes, he smiled.

"You can equip Brinsley with a Maxim silencer, before he makes his appearance in public."

Denby and the others understood perfectly and a laugh went up behind Crosby as he and Lathrop strode up the wharf together. However, it was a laugh that lacked vitality and it died into a sudden hush as curious, suspicious, frightened eyes followed him and Lathrop into the headquarters building where, on the second floor, several department heads had their living quarters.

THEY entered Crosby's rooms, which overlooked the broad, swift running sweep of Segwanga Creek in an upriver direction, and Lathrop carefully closed the door while Crosby strolled to the particular window of his living room that gave him the best view of several trading factories fringing the curve of the creek immediately to the north.

The first of these factories was Barlow's. The next was Tanner's, and Crosby could see just the main wharf and the roof of the oil yard from where he stood. But on the wharf, very close to the edge, was a slim figure in white, and beside this figure was a polo pony.

"What the devil happened?" Lathrop demanded at once, following Crosby to the window and dropping his official mask of indifference on the way. "Where's Tanner? And Brant and the *Vixen?*"

Crosby's eyes came away from the polo pony and the figure in white with the sharp realization that the moment for decision in several directions had come.

He had not bothered to defend himself against Brinsley's whining symphony, because Brinsley did not matter, and was too eager to think what he wanted to believe in any case. But Lathrop was different. Or, at least, Crosby hoped he was.

"You have had no word from Brant in the past three or four days?" he asked mildly.

"I? Why should he communicate with me, unless he needed support of some sort? You were running this affair, and he was acting under your orders, not mine."

"Was he?"

"Why, of course!"

"Then why didn't he follow us from Goba as I ordered him to?"

"Goba!"

"Exactly. I left him there with orders to follow in twenty-four hours unless he received a message to the contrary."

"At Goba! Why—why the devil did you do that? Why did you change your original plans? Why—why, damn it, Crosby, this is no time for evasions! Where is Tanner? And your Kroo boys? And Brant and the *Vixen?* What on earth have you done?"

Crosby paused and glanced again toward Tanner's wharf in time to see the figure in white lead the polo pony away from the edge of the wharf and vault lightly into the saddle. He turned sharply from the window.

If he knew Diana Tanner at all, she was on her way to get her own information first hand. What was he going to tell her? And Lathrop? And provincial headquarters at Warri?

The truth?

If he were sure that Tanner had gone under, this might have made a difference; some small difference to Diana, anyway. But he was not sure of this; and as long as Tanner was alive he was still Diana Tanner's husband and that, of course, made the truth impossible.

Not that he was trying, even mentally, to shuffle from under his own official responsibility in the matter. Officially, he was probably damned in any event, because, even though no one knew about it, he *had* taken Tanner's advice and had acted upon it, and he was prepared to have his reputation as a commissioner stand or fall on the outcome of the disastrous results of this advice.

But that *she* should become involved

because he had pledged himself to secrecy —that was quite different.

Crosby's eyes were cloudy with doubt as he moved to a small desk in which he found an unopened tin of cigarets. Deliberately cutting the top out of the tin he appeared to be ignoring Lathrop's boring gray eyes completely. Finally Lathrop exploded:

"Why the devil don't you answer? Why did you leave Brant at Goba—after promising protection to Tanner and the rest? Where is Tanner? And the houseboys and carriers? What in God's name, Crosby, have you done!"

And a swelling buzz of voices on the beach below seemed suddenly to ask the same question.

CHAPTER VII

FORTITUDE

CROSBY finished cutting the top out of the tin of cigarets.

"We ran into a *juju* play of some sort," he explained quietly. "One of those chalked up affairs with lots of yelling and I'm afraid, a garnishing of human sacrifice. Obviously we arrived at the wrong moment and—"

"Yes, yes," Lathrop broke in impatiently. "But why did you not take Brant along and—"

"We arrived at the wrong moment," Crosby repeated deliberately. "And in the fuss that followed we were just so many targets for those chalked up devils to shoot at. Tanner went down on the first volley and the Kroo boys scattered all over the shop. You know the stuff. Ketterell was hit, too, but we managed to pull him through and—"

"Left Tanner behind!"

"And here we are," Crosby finished calmly.

"Didn't you—didn't you try to help Tanner?"

"It was impossible to do anything for Tanner."

"But not impossible to save Ketterell?" Lathrop's voice held a sharp and ugly note—sharper and uglier probably than he knew. And there was nothing very sudden about his attitude or his rather too eager point of view.

It was the point of view of a man who, like Brinsley, wanted to think what he believed and, unless Crosby were greatly mistaken, he had, somehow or other, had a little time in which to become accustomed to the thought.

"You know what the trading fraternity is going to think of that, don't you?" he added. "Particularly since you had the means at hand to provide Tanner and those luckless Kroo boys with adequate protection?"

Crosby helped himself to a cigaret, held out the tin to Lathrop, and tried to pay no attention to the rise and fall of the excited voices beneath his window; a babble of sound that, now and then, was punctuated by a prolonged whining wail of mourning for the dead.

"Evidently the trading fraternity isn't the only element that is going to think what you suggest," he said. "But, by the grace of the good Lord and the help of one of Lori Egba's daughters—Nanda, I think she said her name was—we—What's up?"

Lathrop had taken hold of the cigaret tin but his grip seemed to be insecure because it slipped from his fingers and thudded to the floor, scattering cigarets all over Crosby's colorful, native made mats.

"Sorry," he grunted, and stooped to retrieve the cigaret tin and its scattered contents. "Clumsy of me." He coughed to clear his throat. "Devilish situation that must have been, Crosby. No end nasty while it lasted. What?"

"Just a trifle. Particularly since Loko's chop had been doctored, and the launch was rifled and set adrift, so that it wasn't where we expected it to be when we needed it most. Loko came to himself later and did a damned good job of rescuing Brinsley and Ketterell and myself in the nick of time, and—"

"His chop doctored, Crosby?" Lathrop's interruption as he straightened up

was skeptical in the extreme. "I suppose that's Loko's version?"

"No—just Nanda's."

"Oh."

Lathrop turned to put the cigaret tin on a small wicker center table, then fumbled in his pockets for a match.

"A light, Lathrop?" Crosby queried and held out a lighted match. "And a drink, perhaps?"

"No—er—no, thanks. Not now." Lathrop puffed nervously on the cigaret. "You'll want to wash up and—"

"Oh, no hurry. I've been dirty so long, I'm beginning to feel that a top layer of Niger mud is quite natural." Crosby flung himself into a Madeira chair and called for a houseboy. "Why don't you sit down? Brant and the *Vixen* are, I suppose, still at Goba, so your end of things is intact. You have nothing to worry about."

"There'll be the devil to pay when Warri hears of this!" Lathrop exploded. "Bradbury revels in this kind of thing!"

Bradbury was the provincial commissioner and his headquarters were at Warri. He was a long legged, lantern jawed individual with an infinite capacity for making his presence felt to the remotest corners of the province, and district commissioners in particular were supposed to quake at the mention of his name.

"I suppose so," Crosby agreed. "But Brant will doubtless have a very good reason to offer for not obeying orders and, in any event, you won't—"

"You are sure Brant understood he was to follow in twenty-four hours unless he received orders to the contrary?"

"Quite sure."

"Hunh." Evidently Lathrop doubted it, and added, "You'll pardon my amazement I know—but why on earth did you decide to change your plans and go in without him?"

Crosby studied Lathrop's amazement and found it excellent.

"You did not know that I had ordered Brant to remain at Goba?"

"I? What the devil, Crosby! How should I know you had made any change in your plans?"

"Then you haven't received any reports of any sort since we left here to go to Walla's town?"

"Nothing. Not a word."

CROSBY paused. He knew Lathrop was lying, and just why Lathrop should lie in a case of the kind was not a little mysterious. A houseboy entered in response to Crosby's summons and he ordered drinks. Then, when the boy had gone, he said:

"All right. Better recall Brant and the *Vixen*, and we'll wait further orders on my report to Bradbury. You know, of course, that this thing has just begun. We'll have to teach old Walla the customary expensive lesson."

"Yes, yes, of course. Quite so," Lathrop interrupted nervously. "But are you—er—are you sure Tanner is dead?"

Again Crosby paused, and the sharp clatter of hoofs sounding above the babble of voices below advised him that Diana Tanner was passing the tennis courts. Lathrop's chin lifted sharply to listen, and the smile that broke upon his lips had an involuntary sneer in its makeup.

"What difference will that make?" Crosby asked mildly, knowing perfectly well what difference Tanner's fate would make in more directions than Lathrop probably knew about.

"Well, old chap," Lathrop began, with a tolerant condescension, "don't you see, if Tanner is still alive and in Walla's hands, we'll have to be rather careful how we jump if we hope to get him out of there. Walla is a vicious old devil and, after all, you—that is we let poor Tanner in for this with guarantees of protection and—well, we are in a deuce of a fix. If we hadn't decided to leave Brant at Goba—"

"You mean *I* led Tanner into this, and that if *I* hadn't left Brant at Goba things would have been different. Don't hesitate to say what you mean, Lathrop."

"Well—I—oh, confound it, Crosby!

Don't you see how our hands are tied? Until we get Tanner out of there, alive or dead, we can't move. The trading beaches are going to set up a terrible howl, and—er—the interest some of us have shown in Tanner's wife—"

"Meaning the interest *I* have shown in Tanner's wife?" Crosby said definitely and rose.

"Very well,"—stiltedly. "If you prefer it that way." A short, heavy pause; then, "And I imagine you do. Your egotism, Crosby, is one of your most refreshing attributes." Lathrop smiled and this time the sneer in his smile was not the least involuntary. "But when you try to do business with a vicious old beast like Walla, you need something more than egotism to carry you through."

Crosby nodded quite seriously, and as he listened to the sound of hoofbeats on concrete underneath his windows, he said mildly:

"I get your drift, Lathrop. Since I got Tanner in, it's up to me to get him out." He strolled to a window overlooking the beach as a houseboy entered with a tray and bottles and glasses. "And to make the gesture complete, I'd better take Ketterell back and leave him where he originally fell."

Behind Crosby's back, Lathrop's sharp gray eyes expressed a baffled, jealous hate that would have startled even Brant and Diana Tanner, both of whom had had opportunities to suspect much that Lathrop did not customarily reveal.

"It might not be a bad idea," he said, and tried to keep his voice level. "Though I think your idea of humor at a time like this is in damned bad taste."

Crosby did not answer. He was looking down upon a slim figure in white who was standing beside a polo pony talking to Denby, the police commissioner. Nurse Raymond was talking to the pony and Captain Markly's wife was trying to engage the attention of every one at once. A wide ring of staring eyed natives surrounded the group, and fussy, bare legged colored police with batons were enjoying their opportunity to strut their authority over lesser mortals.

Then, just as a low and lingering wail lifted itself above all other sounds and stretched already tautened nerves to the breaking point, Diana Tanner looked up.

In the green line shadow of her sun helmet, it was difficult to know what her eyes said; deep, blue-black eyes that were mysterious enough at any time. But her lips were smiling slightly and her riding crop came up in a sharp little salute that, with an air of comradeship, appeared to want to defy the situation in general, and Mrs. Markly in particular.

Crosby winced. Slight and trivial as Diana Tanner's gesture was, it was a gesture of fearless kindliness that brought a sudden rush of color into his cheeks and forehead, and a choky lump into his throat. Of course, it was just a kindly gesture; this and nothing more. He wasn't fool enough to think—

"Am I to understand, Crosby, that you want Brant recalled?"

Lathrop's voice behind him brought him out of a stifling heaviness with a jerk; and though he knew he could not be seen from below as plainly as he could see, he returned Diana's smile and salute, then wheeled from the window to face Lathrop who was grounding the butt of his cigaret in an ash tray.

"Recall Brant? Certainly. And at once. Have Markly commission a launch and get her under way as quickly as possible." He moved toward the tray which the houseboy had placed on the wicker table. "But you'll have a drink first?"

"No—er—no, thanks," Lathrop said, but made no immediate move to go. Obviously he had something on his mind and presently, while Crosby poured himself a Scotch and soda, the captain said slowly and deliberately, "It is your plan then, to leave Tanner, and any of the Kroo boys who may be still alive, to whatever fate Walla may have in store for them, while you wait for Bradbury to act?"

Crosby completed the business of pour-

ing himself a drink. Then he asked quietly—

"Have you any suggestions to make?"

"I'd suggest leaving Brant at Goba."

"If he *is* at Goba. Just at the moment, Lathrop, we don't know where he is, and I think it would be a good idea to find out. Don't you?"

"You left him at Goba,"—sharply.

"Yes. And I ordered him away from there—to follow me in twenty-four hours. If he obeyed orders, he's still looking for Walla's town. If he didn't—well, don't you think it's up to you to find out what's happened to part of your army?"

"There is no need to indulge in that sort of sarcasm!"

"No? Very well. Your orders are to find Brant and the *Vixen* and report to me. That will be enough for the present." He raised his glass. "Chin-chin. And good luck to you."

LATHROP'S mouth opened—and shut. Then, very abruptly, he spun upon his heel and went out. A moment later the rolling figure of Captain Markly appeared in the doorway, his eyes still following Lathrop to the staircase. Presently, he came in.

"What's on *his* mind?" he asked. "He looked fit to murder his own mother."

"Perhaps he already has, Markly. I've frequently suspected it." Crosby smiled. "Have a drink."

"Just a snifter. Straight. We got Ketterell in the hospital all right, and Brinsley has a clean shirt and a sun helmet. But there's all sorts of talk. All sorts. Black and white. Barlow's agent was asking about Tanner and a couple of assistants from some of the other trading beaches happened along and they wanted to know what about Tanner, too.

"Everybody seems to want to know just what happened to Tanner and—er—what we are going to do about it. Chin-chin." He gulped down the drink Crosby had poured for him. "My wife was saying—you know Brinsley's begun talking since he got into that clean shirt—and my wife was saying—"

"All right," Crosby broke in quietly. "Get a launch into commission at once and report to Lathrop for orders."

"A launch? Lathrop?"

"Yes. Lathrop will tell you where he wants the launch to go."

"But the *Magpie* is the only—"

"That'll be all right."

"But the mail?"

"Damn the mail!"

"Yes, sir."

Crosby laughed.

"Have another drink, Markly. And don't let the talk of the beach get you so excited that you think I'm Bradbury."

"Excited! Me! Why—thanks, Crosby. Chin-chin." The second snifter followed the first. "I'm not excited. Not a bit. Everybody else is and it's getting me rattled. My wife was saying—"

"All right. I suppose the *Magpie* is ready to go out at any minute?"

"Any minute," Markly assured him.

"Good."

"But my wife was saying—"

"All right. Report to Lathrop."

"—that Mrs. Tanner—"

"What!"

"Wanted to see you."

"Then why the devil didn't you say so!"

"Say so! Say so! Who the hell's excited now? Shall I send her up? My wife could—"

"I'm expecting Denby any minute," Crosby broke in quickly. "Have Mrs. Tanner come up with him."

"Denby?"—weakly.

"The police department should be the best of chaperones," Crosby said, and passed into his bedroom to the wash basin. "I'll be ready in five minutes."

Markly followed him to the bedroom door.

"My—er—my wife suggested bringing her up here," he said desperately.

"And she'll blame you for failing to carry out her plans. Is that it?"

Markly looked pathetic. He had been a really good sailorman, too, in his

day. Presently, he stammered hopelessly:

"Well—I—this climate—too much quinine. You know how it is—and Mrs. Markly's nerves—I have to make allowances . . ."

Crosby shook his head slowly.

"The affairs of state, Markly, call for many sacrifices. So please convey to Mrs. Markly my thanks for her suggestion and tell her that I appreciate her thoughtfulness very much, even though I find myself unable to act upon it in its entirety. And for heaven's sake, don't look like that."

"Like what?"

"As if I'd stabbed you in the back."

Markly did not smile or utter a sound of any sort. He just rolled slowly and quietly out, leaving Crosby to wash the Niger mud from his hands and face, while the babble of voices below lifted and fell, and another wailing moan seemed to climb to high heaven and cry to the black gods of blood for vengeance.

Tragedy and comedy; laughter and tears; the colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady—all of them sisters under their skins.

Crosby smiled, sloshed his face clean and mumbled a prayer into the towel as his thoughts ran on:

"But no tears, dear God, no tears! I couldn't stand that." Then assuringly as he buttoned himself into a clean shirt, "But she won't be likely to cry with Denby around."

Footsteps sounded on the stairs—riding boots; a low, tinkling voice answered by Denby's rumbling staccato. Footsteps in the hall—Denby's knuckles on the living room door.

"Come in. I'll be with you in a minute. Sorry to have to keep you waiting."

"It's perfectly all right," Denby called out, smiled down at his companion in a large way—and passed on to his own rooms!

Diana Tanner came in alone.

TO BE CONCLUDED

When Crook Meets Crook

By JOHN L. CONSIDINE

IT IS a well known fact that professional gamblers, square or otherwise, usually wind up broke. In my childhood I knew by sight three or four old sports who had been worth, in their day, from a quarter to a half million dollars; money made not entirely out of gambling in cards, for much of it came from speculating in mining stocks. But when I knew them they were running little games in an expiring mining camp, and making barely enough to keep the wolf from the door.

These belonged to that rare type, the honest gambler. That was the reason, perhaps, why they were not entirely broke. The crook, gambler or not, almost invariably has his own pet folly, his private system for getting rid of his ill gotten gains. It is as true of him as of any of his dupes that "the fool and his money are soon parted". And the urge that moves him is imperative. Every one nearly has

heard the classic about the sport who, warned that the faro game against which he was playing was crooked, shrugged and replied:

"Yes, I know it. But what's a man going to do? It's the only game in town."

A crook who died in the Far West a few years ago made more than a million out of various kinds of grafting and boasted that he had beaten seventy indictments. He finally went up against the wrong man, a United States district attorney who could be neither bribed nor framed, and was sent up for a term of years. Released on parole, he died poor. The ponies had been his bane. Another who has made millions out of wildcat stocks has dropped a fortune in faro and on the races. Both devoted years to studying the dope on the horses, but that was a game they could not beat.

The wariest of crooks cherishes some illusion or other. Canada Bill, king of the three-card monte swindlers, would not believe that there could be anything crooked about casino. He would play no other game, and would stake from a hundred to a thousand dollars on a deal; and so fed fat a group of crooks in St. Louis, where he spent the periods between train trips in search of dupes for his monte game.

Once in awhile the crook encounters a non-professional who proves too much for him at his own game, but usually for a small amount. Such a case was the encounter between Slim Jim and John Uhlhorn. Slim Jim was a gambler who worked the trains from Virginia City, Nevada, to Reno, and from Reno to San Francisco. Uhlhorn was a traveling salesman for Palmer & Ray, San Francisco type founders. At the time he met Slim Jim he was introducing a new variety of babbitt metal and had about one hundred bars of the metal, weighing about a quarter of a pound apiece, in his bag. Although a new man on the Overland run, he knew Slim Jim perfectly, but Jim did not know him.

Jim "roped" him into a game in which he had lost but a few dollars when he seemed to be broke. Reaching into his grip he drew forth a bar of babbitt, laid it on the table and said—

"I play that for twenty-three dollars."

Jim took him to be a silver miner on his way to the mint at Carson. He glanced at the bar, hefted it, laid it down, and put up three dollars in change—laying down a bid of twenty—which Uhlhorn gathered in. Jim won the bar, of course, and Uhlhorn came to the front with another to back the next hand, getting three dollars more in change. Eventually he lost the one hundred bars and got up from the game with three hundred dollars in change.

It was a month before he met Slim Jim again, and again it was on a train.

"Hold on a minute," said Jim. "You remember those bars I won from you in a poker game? Well, I took the trouble to have the stuff assayed and the assayer returned a valuation of six cents and a half to the pound."

"Some mistake there—" began Uhlhorn.

"No chance for a mistake," Jim broke in. "The assayer was Frank Fielding, chief of the Bonanza firm's office at Virginia City, the best assayer in the State of Nevada."

"Got the assay report with you?" inquired Uhlhorn.

"You bet," and Jim handed the document over.

Uhlhorn eyed the figures with a puzzled expression and repeated his belief that there was some mistake.

"Bet you a hundred there isn't," offered Jim.

"No," said Uhlhorn. "I am constitutionally opposed to sure thing games and I don't want to take your money away from you. But I still think this man Fielding is trying to fool you, for I had those bars assayed by the best assayer in San Francisco, and he said they would only go six cents and a quarter a pound."

Slim Jim pondered this a minute. Then he smiled grimly.

"We're pulling into Reno, stranger," he said. "Come and have a drink on me."

CAPTIVE IN HAITI

By GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

Author of "Four Years Beneath The Crescent"

AFTER the disastrous battle of Carazua, on the Goajiria peninsula, Venezuela, my few surviving companions-in-arms and myself piled into our little schooner *La Libertad* and set sail for Santo Domingo. I was lying on deck, on an old soiled mattress, shivering with fever. My right leg was swollen to an abnormal size due to a bayonet thrust which I had sustained during the battle. From the turquoise colored sky the sun was shining mercilessly on my little band of *bravos* and Captain Bibelot, our loyal Haitian ally. They were crowding around me, telling me stories and jokes to distract my mind, while our ex-Venezuelan revolutionary cruiser, *La Libertad*, now reduced to its former humble category of a small Haitian coasting schooner, kept gliding gracefully over the heaving swells of the Caribbean.

Occasionally our jet-black captain, or rather, Monsieur Bibelot, tried to cheer me up with an encouraging:

"Don't let that fever worry you, *mon Général*. I am sorry for the mosquito that should bite you; it will get poisoned!"

Nevertheless and in spite of his jests, I could not help feeling a little despondent because I realized that I was sailing toward a shadowy though rather interesting future, toward a voluntary exile which was going to last for many, many years—because I had played and lost. But I determined to be a good loser. I had made up my mind to quit being a gilded youth, to quit walking on dead men's legs; to forget that I was well to do and to go out into the world to earn a living with my sword, soldier of fortune style.

That was the second time in my life that I had taken a great resolution. The first I had taken when I was sixteen

and a half, after six disgraceful months which I had spent in Paris in silk hat and formal dress. At that time, as after the battle of Carazua, I had felt of a sudden that indescribable sadness and loneliness which has been haunting me ever since. I had started to look with disgust, almost with remorse, at the life I was leading. Ambition was clutching at my heart with its iron grip. I felt restless, I wanted to become a soldier and a scholar at no matter what price.

I saw armor gleaming. I saw the snow-white sails of an Armada gliding silently into blue distance—toward the Spanish Main, on whose golden shores deep green waves were thundering and breaking in endless succession, like a dazzling ribbon; toward Castilla de Oro and its white silent towns whose silver bells were ringing. I heard the snarl of leopards in the heart of the African jungle. I heard the roar of cannon on the yellow China Sea. I heard the mournful howling of the "hunting pack" on the eternal snows of the frozen North. I saw the golden statue of a Buddha smiling enigmatically into eternity . . .

I will never forget as long as I live those lonely nights at Brussells, where I had gone to bury myself for some time—while bending over my books getting ready for the great tragedy of my life. For, as it usually happens, once ambition has been kindled and, especially when it is seconded by tradition, it is bound to get the upper hand in the long run.

After an uneventful week we finally sighted the coast of Santo Domingo in the vicinity of Puerto Plata. Fearing that Van Dusen, Castro's arch spy in Santo Domingo City, might have got wind of our proximity, we decided to anchor off the coast, near the United Fruit Company's plantation, where I intended to go ashore and wait until Fatty Johns could send a boat to take me to Puerto Plata.

The chief engineer of the plantation, a Scotsman, whom I had met before, was kind enough to lodge me in his bungalow and to see that I received proper medical attention. So far so good.

Next day my Venezuelan fellow revolutionists departed for Colombia to join the remnants of our nationalist forces in the border states. Those boys were game and regular diehards. I could not help feeling a pang in my heart when I saw our little schooner disappear in the distance with the Venezuelan tricolor proudly waving from her mainmast; because I realized that fate had forced me to burn the bridges behind me when it allowed that Castrista soldier to thrust his bayonet through my thigh.

On the following day my old friend Fatty Johns arrived in a launch and took me to Puerto Plata. There, thanks to my healthy constitution and the care of an experienced Spanish surgeon, I was soon able to walk once again on two legs. But the wicked spell of malarial fever which I had contracted in La Goajira kept on bothering me. So much so that I had to postpone my return to Colombia, temporarily at least.

In the meantime the news of my return had reached Santo Domingo City, where Van Dusen got busy immediately. Realizing that he could not obtain my extradition on the grounds of "political reasons," he kept bothering President Jimenez, who was a weak man, until the latter ordered his confidant, El Sordo, governor of Puerto Plata, to keep a watchful eye on me. He did not have to give El Sordo that order twice because the latter was a personal enemy of General Mon Caceres, governor of the province of El Cibao, who had befriended me after my first arrival at Puerto Plata, and of whom I was supposed to be a partisan for that reason. Tired at last of being importuned by El Sordo's secret police, I decided to move to Santiago de los Caballeros, the capital city of El Cibao, where Mon Caceres was expecting me.

To better explain the situation I may as well add that old President Jimenez feared Mon Caceres' popularity because Mon Caceres was the man who two or three years previously had winged Santo Domingo's arch tyrant, Ulysses Heuraux, alias Lili. But for Lili's "sudden" re-

moval President Jimenez never would have been able to return to power. In other words, realizing that he owed to Mon Caceres his ascendency, Jimenez feared lest the latter try to oust him from power some day by means of a *coup d'état.* That fear, cleverly fanned by El Sordo, forced Mon Caceres at last to deliver that coup much against his will, only for reasons of self-protection.

During my stay in Santiago de los Caballeros Mon Caceres consulted me frequently in regard to his future plans. He even confided to me the day on which he intended to raise the banner of revolt and asked me to join him, a proposition which I readily accepted because I owed him a debt of gratitude and *noblesse oblige,* as the old saying goes.

WHILE convalescing at Puerto Plata Fatty Johns informed me of what was happening. The disquieting rumors which kept popping up every now and then, added to the animosity which El Sordo felt toward me, hastened my decision to move to Santiago. The night before my departure something happened that helped to hasten that decision because it put the fear of God into me.

Fatty Johns and I were sitting at a table in one of the numerous open air cafés which surrounded the principal square, or plaza, of Puerto Plata, having a whisky and soda. It was on a Sunday night. The plaza was brightly illuminated. In its center a military band was playing a potpourri of jazz and opera music. While over its cement sidewalks a dense crowd of natives, in Sunday attire and with a sprinkling of pretty señoritas, kept milling around, gaily chatting.

Suddenly an ominous, rumbling sound followed by a volley of dull detonations, struck our ears. Instantly the military band stopped playing. The musicians dropped their instruments and raced to join the panic stricken promenaders who were scattering in all directions, looking for shelter and screaming at the top of their voices *"Dios mio, una revolución!"*

Before Fatty and I could realize what it was all about a corpulent, jet-black lady, weighing about three hundred pounds and carrying a couple of pickaninnies under each arm, stampeded over our table, like a juvenile hippopotamus, nearly crushing us to death. We were in the clutches of a *revolución,* and a big one to judge by the merciless way in which that panic stricken mob kept stamping the dust out of our moth eaten tuxedos.

But, as usually happens in those tropical islands during the cyclone season—with the same rapidity with which the storm had struck us it also subsided, followed by a unanimous *"gracias a Dios!"*

Whereupon the frightened musicians picked up their battered instruments and the throng started milling once more around and around, discussing with a profusion of gestures the cause of that frightful false alarm . . . a poor despondent donkey with an empty kerosene can tied to its tail, which had galloped terror stricken down one of the narrow lanes leading to the plaza.

As soon as I arrived at Santiago I made myself at home in its most fashionable hotel, because, as the guest of the governor, I would have no hotel bills to pay. My I.O.U's at the hotel bar, which ran sometimes into many dollars a day, were always duly honored.

Everybody in the street took his hat off to me or greeted me with a grandiloquent gesture of his hand, because Mon Caceres was extremely popular and I, as one of his *hombres de confianza,* naturally shared some of his popularity.

If I had only suspected at that time the dire consequences that being "a confidant of the governor" was going to have for me in the near future, I would have evaporated so quickly that no one would have been able to see me.

The truth is that one night while I was attending a little party, heaven knows where, I forgot that "the thing" was going to happen the following day. Just a slip

of memory. And why not? Drinks were plentiful and the company was good.

Next day, or rather, next evening, when I woke up in my hammock with a head as big as a church and trying to cope with a new spell of malarial fever that was shaking the life out of me, Fatty Johns rushed into my room to announce that Mon Caceres had rebelled and was advancing with the garrison of Santiago on Santo Domingo City. Also that El Sordo was reported to have left for the little frontier town of Dajabon, on the Haitian border, to foment a counter-revolution.

I never sobered up so quickly as I did that evening.

"If you don't get a hustle on yourself," Fatty kept shouting, "you will get pinched by El Sordo and shot on the spot, for you are a marked man."

My duty, under those circumstances, was to try to protect Mon Caceres' rear guard by patrolling the Haitian border. So I gulped down a few mouthfuls from a bottle of rum-quinine which was standing on the table, dressed in a hurry and got busy. I recruited a few men—always an easy task in a country where it is more interesting to fight than to work—and, after announcing (for the purpose of increasing the number of my volunteers) that I was acting as the lieutenant of one of Mon Caceres' right hand men, I struck out for Dajabon where, as I said before, El Sordo was supposed to have established his headquarters.

Besides, by sticking around Dajabon I always had a chance to make a getaway by way of Haiti in case Mon Caceres' uprising should fail. Unfortunately, things turned out differently from what I expected.

After a painful journey of several days, during which I had to be carried in a hammock on account of the freshly healed wound in my leg which did not allow me to sit on a horse, we reached the hamlet of El Pinar. And thence, while trying to flank from the west the town of Dajabon, we passed by a mistake into Haitian territory, for I did not know that a little stream which we crossed about midnight represented the border line.

We found this out after sunrise, when we saw ourselves cut off by a force of about eight hundred Haitian rebels under the command of a Coronel Marchand who claimed that he was the aide of General Nord, a notorious Haitian *condottieri.*

Marchand's troops were made up of picked men—giant, fullblooded negroes, dolled up in fantastic military attire. Some wore French military coats of the First Empire, supplemented by loincloths, and occasionally by a battered silk hat. Others were going about in negligée, with a shirt and nothing else. Some wore trousers without shirts; others again only a white celluloid collar with a pair of golden epaulets attached to it, so that I believed they must have divided the available raiment in brotherly fashion.

Those Haitians were certainly a sight worth seeing. I could not help laughing as I lay entrenched with my hundred-odd Dominicans behind some mahogany logs, ready to blaze away at the first provocation.

The Haitians, in spite of their numerical superiority, did not seem anxious to fight, and asked for a parley, which I readily granted.

I met Marchand between the lines. He had spent some time in Paris, wore gold rimmed spectacles, and his favorite perfume seemed to be lilac for I could smell him many feet away as he approached us. I must say, however, that as far as manners go, and aside from some dreadful malodorous ointment which he used to flatten his kinky hair, Marchand was a perfect gentleman. He realized, he said, that we had crossed the frontier by mistake, so that, if we wanted to retreat to Dominican territory, he would withdraw his forces a mile or two back, so that my men could move off without trouble.

This sensible proposal I accepted and Marchand escorted me personally, without a single orderly, as far as the border line, talking most of the time about his amorous adventures in Paris where, it

seems, he had been attaché of the Haitian legation.

By the time we reached the frontier we were thick friends and he asked me to share a bottle of champagne that he was carrying in his saddle bags. I accepted and sent my men ahead to Monte Cristi with my adjutants, Moran and Betancourt, while I (not wishing Marchand to think that I trusted him less than he trusted me) remained alone with him enjoying a few glasses of Cliquot.

When I was about to depart, fifteen minutes later, two giant hands, like those of a gorilla, clutched at my shoulders and then closed about my throat. And when I awoke I found myself stripped to my underwear, my hands tied behind my back, while Marchand was bending over me, laughing: laughing I suppose at the idiotic foreigner who had trusted—what he claimed to be—a high *papaloi* of the voodoo rites. And to make matters worse, he added that he needed my blood and encephalic matter for a religious ceremony he was contemplating. I do not remember what else he told me because I was boiling with rage. I insulted him in the vilest terms imaginable, hoping against hope that he might kill me. But my efforts were in vain. He just laughed and laughed, while telling me all about the wonderful fetish drinks he intended brewing with my blood.

After the Haitians had laughed at me and abused me to their heart's content, the end of a rope was tied around my neck, and the other end of it to a horse's tail. For days I was forced along in that unreasonable manner over the countryside and across the jungle district of La Riviere.

At first, when I saw the rope, I thought they were going to hang me and thanked God from the bottom of my heart for taking mercy on me. However, when I realized what those Haitians were really up to, and the fate which was awaiting me, I grew faint with apprehension.

Finally, realizing that fate had willed it that the torture might be in expiation of my many sins, I quieted down a bit and decided to take advantage of the first opportunity to give those Haitians the slip.

Weakened by the spell of chronic fever which had reduced me almost to skin and bones, I stumbled and fell repeatedly, causing the horse to drag me by the throat, sometimes for several yards at a time, before its rider could rein in, jump off, and help me back on my feet.

During those occasions when the hated foreigner, almost choked to death, with his tongue hanging out of his bleeding mouth, had been brought to once more and kicked along again with curses and maledictions, the merriment of my captors seemed to have no limits. Those worthies did not get a chance every day to vent their race hatred on a "hornless goat," on a hated foreigner, and especially one like myself who had dared to defy them at the head of only a handful of Dominican soldiers.

WHILE crossing the forest belts those hyenas would yell every now and again: "*Voici le chien étranger; l'étranger!*" whereupon the dwellers of the jungle villages sallied forth from the encircling twilight, stark naked in many instances, to throw mud and rocks at me and to spit in my face.

At last, after many days of marching and countermarching to evade the Haitian government troops which were pursuing us, we reached the ruins of an ancient palace, called Sans Souci, that a Haitian ruler had built there long ago. From the odds and ends of the Haitians' conversation, which I managed to pick up now and then, Cap Haitien could not be far away. There we rested for awhile. Then we headed for a patch of jungle across which led a trail which came near claiming my bones, because by that time I had grown so weak that the Haitians had to carry me strapped to the packsaddle of one of their skinny mules. This beast apparently resented my company, for every few minutes it stopped to squeal and buck the liver out of me.

After some time, maybe an hour, maybe ten, we struck a clearing and started climbing, goose fashion, a steep narrow trail which led to the summit of a low mountain peak. This was crowned by the ruined battlements of a lofty castle which Emperor Christophe had erected on that cliff for reasons of his own. To judge by its size, that ruin must have represented a superb stronghold and ideal hiding place in which Marchand intended to entrench himself.

As soon as we reached its main gate, which was low and doorless, the members of my escort pulled me down from the pack mule and dragged me past several dark pits, just beyond the entrance, into which some of those negroes wanted to throw me. Fortunately the majority of them overruled the motion on the grounds that after a day or so my corpse would be smelling so badly that they would have to pull me out of there again. Hallelujah!

While those worthies kept dragging my bleeding body, like a sack of flour, across the main courtyard, I was keeping my eyes wide open, because I remembered the old saying that as long as there is life there is hope. First we passed a sort of open gallery from which a row of ancient muzzle-loaders were gaping silently into nothingness. There I rested for awhile sitting on a heap of round cannon balls, and thence we proceeded, over a wide stepped staircase, toward the upper level of the ruin, which boasted in its center a sort of grave or funeral mound, around which our women camp followers started lighting huge bonfires.

A short distance away half a dozen donkeys were dreaming in the shadow of fair sized trees which grew out of the side or on top of the crumbling walls and buttresses of the ruined fortress. Over our heads swarms of hungry buzzards kept crossing and crisscrossing the opal-blue expanse in happy anticipation of the odds and ends which they expected we would leave them after our first meal. But there is where they got left. For our Haitians were too lazy not only to kill a hog (we were carrying no live stock with us except fleas and some ratty pigs) but even to cook a meal. They were living exclusively on raw salt codfish and *tafia-brantwein*, which means they were continually drunk, while I, more dead than alive, reduced to the condition of a living skeleton, lay day after day in a filthy gutter in the company of the pigs.

My hands had been tied from the very start with thongs of rawhide which cut the flesh to the bone and produced festering ulcers. These the enterprising Haitian flies were utilizing to hatch their eggs, much to my discomfort.

One night, while I was at my unrelenting work of trying to free myself by rubbing my rawhide thongs on the sharp edge of a stone, I overheard one of the Haitians saying that Marchand had ordered me to be shot at sunrise. Despair gave me strength. After several hours of desperate effort the sharp edged stone finally cut through the thongs. I was free, at least as far as my hands were concerned. But I was too weak to unfasten the straps around my ankles with my swollen, partly benumbed hands. Those ribbons were too deeply imbedded. They had to be cut with a knife or a bayonet.

It was well after midnight before I had gathered sufficient strength to drag myself out of the ditch without waking up the pigs. After that I sat up and took a good look around. The only sentry in sight was crouching on top of a rampart, apparently fast asleep, for his chin was resting on his chest. The majority of the camp-fires had burned down to mere heaps of glowing coals around which the Haitians lay snoring and scratching their flea bites. There was no danger of the dogs' alarming the camp if they saw me prowling around in the dark. They all had had a smell at me during the several days which I had spent in the ruin and understood, therefore, that I belonged to the family.

After listening for awhile and looking around carefully to make sure that the coast was clear, I crawled with infinite precaution toward the nearest camp-fire.

Inch by inch I wormed my way until I reached the huddled form of a soldier who was lying flat on his back, in the midst of an alcoholic nightmare. The rusty hilt of his bayonet was sticking out from under his ill smelling body. I drew it out of its sheath with trembling hands. Then I crawled back toward my bed companions, the pigs, and freed my legs. They were so stiff and swollen that I had to rub them for quite awhile before I could use them again. Holding on to the ruined walls for support, I made a detour of the smoldering camp-fires and descended, partly on hands and knees, the wide stepped staircase which led to the lower gallery.

Slinking around a pile of débris, I caught sight of the somber silhouette of a sentinel. He was sitting on top of a rusty gun, with a lighted cigaret in his mouth. No sooner had I vanished among the shadows of the roofless hallway and the courtyard, into which led the main entrance of the castle, when the sentry climbed down from his cannon and started pacing up and down in front of the stairway which I had just descended. Encouraged by that sign because it went to prove that my lucky star had not forsaken me, I continued advancing, with tottering knees and with both hands holding on to the walls for support, until I finally reached my goal—the low main entrance of the citadel through which the stars were shining brightly.

In my excitement I must have displaced a rock from the crumbling wall. The sound of the falling stone was followed by the low growl of a vagabond cur. And almost simultaneously with the mongrel's growl a dark shape stirred in front of me, rose to a sitting position and shouted drowsily—

"*Qui vive?*"

With the madness of despair I jumped at the sentry's throat. I did not let go until the giant negro's legs stopped kicking and his powerful body stretched out, trembled slightly and lay still.

The only thing that kept me from swooning after that terrific, almost superhuman effort was the confounded mongrel which kept barking and tearing, alternately, with his thirty-two healthy teeth at my excuse for a pair of drawers which was the only garment I was wear ing. The yelping of the cur had alarmed the camp. Immediately after I left the sentry two rifles cracked, followed by a volley of shots and an infernal chorus of raucous voices bellowing and shrieking into the night that the hated prisoner had escaped.

BY THE time I had managed to brain the mongrel with the butt end of the sentry's gun the first batch of excited Haitians was already galloping down the roofless hallways, yelling, cursing and emptying their guns in my direction; while I, with my last ounce of strength, darted through the gate of the castle and fled, like a rabbit, down the steep mountainside until the shadows of the jungle swallowed me up.

From the heart of the patch of forest, at the foot of the bare castle hill (where I woke up next evening considerably rested after a ten or twelve hour sleep) I wormed my way toward the coast and, therefore, toward Cap Haitien, which I knew could not be far away. I wandered for several days through the thick underbrush, subsisting on guavas and shunning the settlements. Finally I reached the sea at an isolated place. There I remained in hiding until nightfall, feasting on oysters which I opened with the help of a rusty knife blade which I had found on the beach. Most of the natives in the surrounding villages were sympathizers of General Nord. I had to be careful, therefore, lest they betray my hiding place to Marchand or his fellow revolutionists.

I spent most of the day crouching beneath a hollow ledge, with the water up to my neck, in imminent danger of being pounced upon by one of the many sharks or barracudas which infest those waters.

After sunset I heard the voices of a couple of fishermen who were rowing along the coast in the direction of Cap Haitien.

When they came ashore in response to my shouts, and I told them that I was a shipwrecked *marinero*, they took pity on me and an hour later I crawled, like a wet cat, on to the wharf of Cap Haitien, wearing only a soiled shirt and a pair of old overalls which the kind hearted fishermen had presented me.

While approaching "Main Street," I noticed a young German standing beneath a lamp post. He was in shirt sleeves and wore the regulation German narrow brimmed straw hat. He had just locked the door of the establishment in which he was probably employed, and was to all appearances getting ready to go to his home, to enjoy a nice meal, a good cigar and a clean bed—luxuries of which I had been dreaming for many a dreary week.

With the glad anticipation of a poor relation at the sight of a wealthy cousin, I walked up to him, with tottering knees, and was just going to address to him a few words in his native tongue, when our German friend, on catching sight of me, drew back several steps in disgust, as if I were a leper, threw a nickel at my feet and said—

"Go away and don't bother me again."

Seeing that I did not pay any attention to his coin, but looked only at him in amazement, he picked the coin up again and put it back into his pocket with an air of satisfaction.

Amused by the German youth's thrift, I crossed the street and knocked at the door of an English merchant whom I saw sitting on his veranda, enjoying a drink. The minute he heard that a "stranger" was calling he had me come up at once and, after listening attentively to what I had to say, asked me to stay there as his guest as long as I wanted.

There I remained in hiding for several days until I negotiated with a Dominican skipper to take me in his schooner to Santiago de Cuba, where he was carrying a cargo—probably contraband.

On the second day of our trip we ran into a storm which nearly blew us off the Caribbean. Our Captain, Antonio Gonzales, managed to drop anchor among a maze of sand banks and coral reefs near the Turtle Islands. There we remained marooned for several days; but not idle, because we captured several dozen giant sea turtles which we sold afterward for quite a little money.

Unfortunately, at the time of our arrival in Santiago de Cuba, things were not too sweet there. Feeling was running high against the Spaniards, the Spanish vice-consul having recently been assassinated. And, being recognized by a Cuban who had served in one of our Spanish volunteer regiments during the siege of Santiago, I had to take to the *manigua*—the Cuban jungle—on the double quick to save my skin from the mob.

Through a strange coincidence I had returned to Santiago by the same route which I had used when I left it at the end of the Spanish-American War—by way of Haiti.

I emerged from the *manigua* at a place near the coast from which I could see quite distinctly the rusty and battered hulls of the Spanish cruisers which had once defended Santiago so gallantly. They were lying stranded, forgotten, turned into heaps of junk, near the rocky seashore. I felt strangely attracted by those battered hulls from whose masts once waved the proud flag of Spain, on whose rotting decks died many a valiant seaman. Unconsciously I kept approaching them, step by step, until I reached the beach, where I lay down in the sand to rest for awhile among those surroundings which were so dear to me because they had witnessed my baptism of blood.

In Baracoa, where I arrived a few days later, I met one of our old scouts who was engaged in contraband trade with Honduras. On his tiny *balandro*, or one-masted schooner, I shipped for the mainland once more and landed at Puerto Cortez, Honduras. I had to be very careful because in those small countries it is very easy to be recognized, and President Estrada Cabrera, of Guatemala, who had many partisans in Honduras, felt

not exactly friendly toward me. He had not forgotten yet our miscarried plan to blow him up in the Sexta Avenida.

THE NIGHT we dropped anchor at Puerto Cabezas I slipped ashore, ragged, barefooted—for my feet were still swollen from my Haitian experience—and with a three weeks' growth of beard on my face. I was wearing a soiled native straw hat pulled down over my eyes to hide my identity. No one could have told me from one of the many sailors and drunken beachcombers who were carousing and bellowing in the malodorous joints which lined the sparsely illuminated waterfront.

Groups of ragged soldiers with six-shooters strapped to their thighs and rusty bayonets hanging from their belts were walking leisurely through the crowded, mud covered street. Some of them were sitting in open bars drinking aguardiente in the company of dark beauties with pink flowers fastened in their black tresses. All in all, the scene was pleasant, almost peaceful. Yet I did not dare ask any one to which party those soldiers belonged, for that would have branded me as a stranger and brought me under suspicion. Besides, another of those terrible spells of swamp fever which I had contracted at Carazua was burning me alive.

So I turned into the first little *fonda* which I happened to come across and curled up on a dry cowhide on the floor of a windowless cubbyhole. There I spent the better part of the night in company with rats, cockroaches and other assorted vermin.

Well after midnight the heavy tread of spurred boots woke me up and I clutched my knife under my shirt.

While I was lying there, wide awake, holding my breath, listening intently, I realized by the rhythm of the footsteps that some one was inspecting the rooms of the *fonda* one by one. I could distinctly hear the reiterated whine of the little Chinese who kept the place. He was whining like a beaten dog and apologizing every now and again for being alive. He indicated that it was not his fault.

Finally the steps stopped in front of my door, which was thrown open unceremoniously. The trembling light of a smoking kerosene lamp struck the musty floor and the corner in which I was lying.

"I tell you, señores, there is no such gentleman staying in my house," whined on the Chinese. "Only that poor sailor—" But that was about as far as he got, because by that time I had jumped up, knife in hand, ready to cut my way out.

To my astonishment one of the army officers who had appeared in the doorway, his face lighted by the kerosene lamp, clicked his heels together in true military style, saluted me stiffly and said:

"Señor Colonel, General Pradilla, commander-in-chief of the revolutionary forces that occupied Puerto Cortez yesterday, has learned through his intelligence department of your presence in the town. He has wired us to invite you to be our guest at the *comandancia*. He has not forgotten your services to the cause of the Central American Union last year!"

In this fantastic but quite delightful manner I was drawn once more into that bloody struggle for union and liberty which will probably not end until the Central American republics have been united under one flag—the flag representing their blood, their traditions and their mutual interests.

For this cause I was destined to serve again. The cause had ideals; it had men; it had a stout heart—but it lacked sufficient guns, at least in its Guatemala-Honduran frontier. It was my job to bring the guns from the Island of Cozumel, off the territory of Quintana Roo, in southern Yucatan.

Centuries ago the Island of Cozumel was a favorite rendezvous of buccaneers. The black flag was seen frequently along its coasts, flying from the masts of ships trying to bury loot or provision themselves inconspicuously. That same spirit of lawlessness—or shall we say independence—today takes the form of smuggling

and in one instance at least, of revolutionary gun running. The Cozumeleros are distinctly independent spirits, and all the measures of Porfirio Diaz to make them behave had been fruitless until the time when I became concerned in the characteristics of the island.

It did not surprise me, therefore, when an itinerant village priest, Padre José, offered to show me the hiding place of a considerable arsenal secreted on the island a year before. That same afternoon sixteen hundred rifles and two hundred rounds of ammunition were taken from the graveyard, where they had been buried under the names of dead smugglers, and carried aboard the schooner *La Rosa*. The sails were hoisted and the schooner set her prow for Puerto Cortez.

Old Porfirio Diaz, who was always ready to lend his fellow dictators a helping hand, had kept the cruiser *Sonora* hovering around the coasts of Yucatan to thwart any gun running that might have been planned for that region.

Several hours out, the *Sonora*, which seemed to have smelled the powder in our hold, hove into sight and made in our direction. But we gave her the slip and about ten days later we reached the Honduran coast in the neighborhood of Tela, east of Puerto Cortez.

Two of our men whom I had sent ashore returned with the report that Puerto Cortez had been recaptured by the government troops during our absence. That news made us feel anything but comfortable. We decided, therefore, to land our cargo of war material at Omoa instead.

When we sailed past Puerto Cortez on the following night its brightly illuminated wharf was bristling with bayonets. Next morning we dropped anchor at Omoa where ready hands unloaded our boxes of ammunition and rifles, and strapped them on the backs of a string of pack mules which our faithful revolutionary agents had been keeping there for us in readiness.

Leaving the straggling hamlet of Santa Clara to the left, our convoy trailed along the foothills of the Merendon Mountains on its way to the Guatemalan frontier, which we expected to strike near Amates. In a week or so we hoped to be at La Trinidad, our final destination.

On the fourth or fifth day, while we were plodding along the bottom of a narrow cañon, my attention was arrested by a large rock which came rolling and bouncing down the steep slope to our left.

Scrutinizing the hillside more closely, I noticed a row of boulders in neat formation on the rim of the hill. I ordered the bugler to sound the alarm, but it was too late. The boulders came thundering down, tearing up the bushes and dragging along hundreds of other rocks, which struck our convoy like a hurricane. Those of our pack animals that did not perish in the crush of stones stampeded in all directions, wild with fright, throwing off their loads, rolling off precipices or braining themselves against the ledges.

Only twenty of my men remained. I gathered them around me and prepared to resist the attack of the troops who had so efficiently trapped us. But Coronel Rodriguez, in command of the government forces, knew his job. His men came at us like furies and no quarter was given or expected.

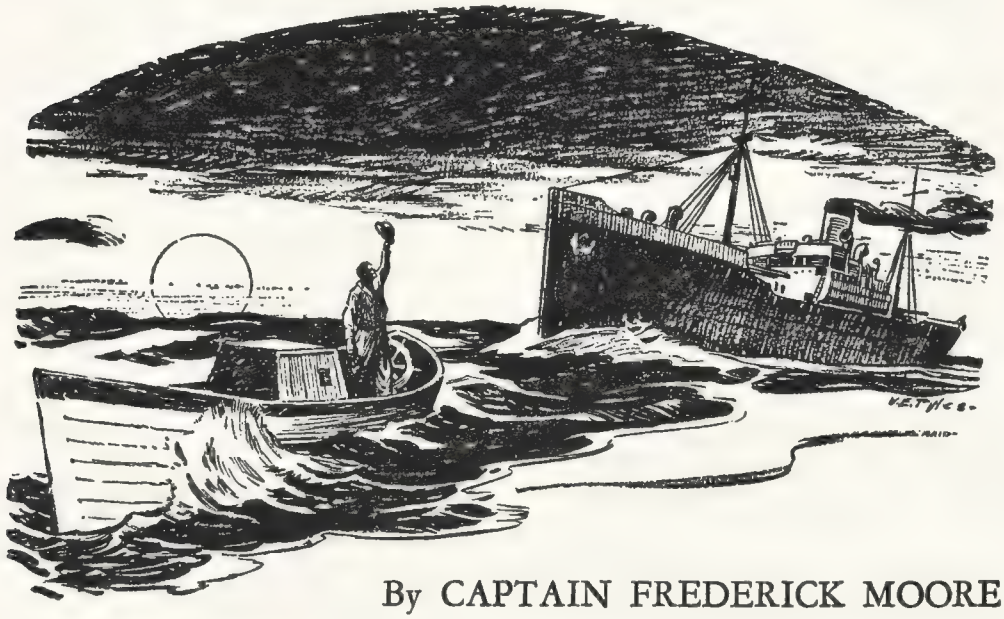
A bullet struck my horse. It reared and threw me over. The butt of a rifle finished my usefulness.

I regained my senses some time later. I was lying face downward, my eyes and ears partly clogged with the blood of the wound in my scalp. Green flies were buzzing about my face. I tried to move and found that I couldn't. Moving my eyes sidewise, I discerned the legs of a buzzard moving about me, its beak nipping at my blood stained hair.

Then horror drove me to my feet. With a terrific effort I flung my arms wide open, and ran like a madman, stumbling over corpses . . .

Two of my men, who had escaped the massacre, finally picked me up and took me to El Salvador, where I recovered.

A NOOSE of PEARLS



By CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

A Mystery of the South Seas

ONLY a white man would be waving a sun helmet. Larson, the mate of the *Mangareva*, picked up the white speck against the afterglow of the sun on the eastern horizon, and as the tramp steamer lifted to the surly ground swell which was running after three days of heavy blowing, the power boat was visible for an instant. The white helmet, waving frantically for assistance, disappeared from view.

It was nearly sundown. Night would come swiftly. The hills of New Guinea were visible to the northward in a purplish smear, and Cape York Peninsula was to the southward, with the swampy land of Saibai Island just gone from view over the port quarter. The *Mangareva* had passed through Torres Straits during the day and was heading up the Great Northeast Channel toward Bligh's Entrance. She was bound for Noumea for orders.

Larson stuffed his glasses into the leather pouch and, with a call to the lookout not to lose sight of the boat ahead, the mate left the bridge and went down to the skipper's rooms, just below the bridge ladder.

"What is it, Mister?" asked Captain Dunham as the mate looked in through the open door.

Gibbins, the only passenger aboard the steamer, was smoking with the skipper.

"Small slate colored boat, two points off the starboard bow, sir. Looks like a power boat—white man in it, wavin' a topee. Wants to speak—or be picked up, sir."

Captain Dunham got to his feet

promptly, glanced at the chart on his desk.

"Change course, Mr. Larson. But what in the devil would a power boat be doing out here?"

"I'd say she'd belong to a pearlin' lugger," said the mate as he passed through the door, hastening for the bridge.

"Oh, pearling lugger," said Captain Dunham to Gibbins. "That's about it, caught in the blow, most likely, and somebody knocking around with a dead engine—and scared stiff that he won't be picked up before dark. The flood current here would drift him down on the Warrior Reefs and he could get caught in some nasty breakers."

The captain was a young man, only recently given command of the tramp. but his weather beaten face and the wrinkles about his gray eyes gave him that peculiar aspect of severity which goes with responsibility at sea. It was just after dinner, and the skipper's white jacket was unbuttoned. He wore his cap with a careless tilt, but his whole figure, as he stood over the chart, showed a keen alertness.

"So we'll rescue the poor devil, eh?" said Gibbins.

He sprawled on the transom seat. His outthrust legs were spare at the ankles, but he wore loose shantung trousers which gave him the appearance of bodily bulk. A little below forty in age, his brown eyes were not very strong and he had a way of peering about him as if the light hurt his vision. The bridge of his nose had the mark of spectacles across it. He had a pleasant smile, and a lazy friendliness. He had taken passage in the tramp to escape from business, being on the vessel's articles as an assistant purser at four shillings a month. That was only a legal fiction, for he paid fat passage money and provided a lavish lot of food and liquor to augment the dining table of the steamer, sharing them with Captain Dunham and Larson. He was obviously a man who was accustomed to the best of everthing.

"Certainly we'll rescue him," said Captain Dunham, as he moved toward the starboard door. "Come along to the bridge. Seeing that I can't beat you at crib or poker, I've got to give you some kind of a show."

"How do we know this chap we pick up won't make a nuisance of himself aboard us?" asked Gibbins, as he rose lazily and yawned noisily.

He stretched his arms over his head and went on as he picked up a watch cap to snug it down on his head.

"We've been a happy family, and this blighter may turn out to be a pest."

"We need him for a four handed game," laughed Dunham.

"He'll be no good at cards," said Gibbins. "He wouldn't be washing around in a boat, signaling for help with a helmet, if he had any brains."

"There's nothing like brains," admitted Dunham. "But nobody ever went to sea yet with enough of 'em to be safe. That's what makes the insurance companies rich."

When they reached the bridge, Larson pointed out the boat. The man was still waving his white helmet, though the *Mangaréva* was running straight for him. Captain Dunham pulled the whistlecord and a dull roar blotted out the sound of water at the bows and the grind of the engines. The man waving the helmet lay back into the stern sheets, satisfied at last that the steamer would not pass him in the swiftly gathering dusk.

"That fellow certainly was worried that he'd be out all night," said Durham. "And I don't blame him. Probably out of food and water, if he had any in the first place, and the storms have driven the pearling fleets for cover."

"Aren't we somewhere near the Baru banks?" asked Gibbins.

"There are pearling banks all along here. And the luggers are always on the hunt for new grounds, but this boy ahead has certainly got separated from his lugger. We'll know in a few minutes, anyhow."

"One man in a boat," mused Gibbins. "And a pearler. Why only one man? If a pearling crew had to abandon a lugger

and take to the boats, why wouldn't a white man have a native diver with him, or a Jap?"

"Say, I can't tell you all that, Mr. Gibbins," said Dunham with a grin. "You just fire those questions at the stranger, but give him a chance first for a drink and a chance to draw his breath."

"Oh, I didn't expect an answer, Skipper. What I'm driving at is that even now it looks queer to me."

"Anything can happen to a pearler, especially if he has pearls aboard."

"And I'm willing to bet it's happened," said Gibbins.

The *Mangareva* rapidly came up to where the small boat rose and fell on the rounded swells. The steamer swung off a little, threw down her helm, shut off her power and, as she lost way, formed a lee for the boat on her port beam.

"What's the trouble with your sewing machine?" bawled Captain Dunham.

The man with the helmet, now at his oars, swung round and, cupping his hands over his mouth, answered:

"Hello, Cap'n! Pick me up, will y'? I've had a devil of a time! Can't stand this much longer."

"All right! Come alongside."

"I can make it."

The boat davits in the welldeck were ready to hook on by the time the stranger came up the ladder which had been dropped. The native crew attended to the salvage of the power boat. And by the time the man came over the side the swift gloom of the tropics had covered the *Mangareva* and lights were glimmering from her portholes.

CAPTAIN DUNHAM and Gibbins were in the welldeck. The first thing they noted was that the stranger's white trousers were wet almost to the waist. Their eyes next caught sight of a belt which held a pair of holstered revolvers.

"My name's Clifton—James Clifton," said the stranger. He thrust a hand out to Gibbins. "Thank you, Cap'n—and I want to save that boat."

"I'm not the master," said Gibbins, though he did shake hands. "Captain Dunham, here; you can thank him."

"Oh, are you Cap'n Dunham? I can't see very well—eyes all salted up. I'm mighty obliged, Cap'n." He thrust out a hand to Dunham.

"What's happened, Mr. Clifton?"

"What's happened? Why, don't my name mean anything to you? I'm out of a pearler, and—" he checked himself and swung toward Gibbins, bending forward to catch a good view of the passenger. "Who's this man?" he demanded. "I thought he belonged, was one of the crew?"

Captain Dunham explained.

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Clifton. "Puzzled me up. I thought this was a freighter. Last thing in my mind was passengers. By George, but I didn't want to be missed! Whew! Few more minutes, and you'd got past in the dark."

He took off his helmet and wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. He was a heavily built man, his round, full face covered with a three days' growth of black stubbly beard and stained with what appeared to be a blend of engine oil, cup grease and rusty bilgewater.

"You're all right now," said Dunham. "Just inject a little of this under your Adam's apple, and you'll feel steadier on your pins." He handed forward a bottle.

Clifton drank, then backed up against a rail stanchion. The motorboat was being hauled on board by the Chinese seamen. Clifton stared at the boat as if startled, then swore gently.

"You damned fool of a boat!" he raged suddenly. "Coughed your lungs out just when I needed you most."

He lost his balance against the rail, and lunged forward unsteadily, colliding with Gibbins. By this time the *Mangareva's* engines were going again and she headed the swells.

"Take it easy," said Gibbins, as he held Clifton steady. "You don't know how weak you are."

Clifton lifted the bottle and drank again, allowing the passenger to hold him upright. Suddenly he turned and thrust

his head forward, trying to catch Gibbins in the beam of light from a porthole.

"What'd you say the name was?" inquired Clifton. "Givons? I knew a man in Sydney by that name, but a lot older. Any relation?"

"The name is Gibbins. I'm in business in S'pore—Gibbins and Duckworth, exporters."

"Oh, yes. Your father started that house. Well, I'm lucky to be aboard here." He swung to Captain Dunham. "Have you got a wireless?"

"Certainly. I can send anything you want, Mr. Clifton. Better come up to my room and have a rest."

Clifton fell in with the skipper and walked forward to the ladder from the welldeck. Gibbins lingered where the seamen were securing the motorboat. And by the time he reached the double room of the captain, a Chinese boy was arriving with a tray of food.

Clifton ate like a famished man. Gibbins returned to his transom seat and lay back against the cushions. He watched Clifton while the rescued man ate, noting the white silk shirt, the platinum watchchain athwart it, the rubber heeled buckskin shoes, and the fine cut of the sea soaked trousers. Clifton was a man of means, and Captain Dunham could tell by the puzzled eyes of Gibbins that the passenger was turning over in his mind the various reasons which might account for such a man being alone in a power dinghy from a pearling lugger. But Clifton did not appear to be ready to discuss what had happened.

Finally, when he had finished his coffee with a grateful grunt and lighted a cigar which Captain Dunham offered, Clifton looked at Gibbins, and then turned to the captain.

"Now, if I could have a talk for a few minutes—confidential. You won't mind, Mr. Gibbins?"

Gibbins was already on his feet.

"Why, of course! I'm only a passenger here, and I wouldn't expect to be present if you've got anything private to discuss." With a wave of his hand to the skipper, he returned to the deck and disappeared somewhere aft.

"You've got something you want to send out by wireless, something secret?" asked Dunham.

"You bet I have," said Clifton with a nervous laugh. He held up a hand and pulled gently at a black silk neckerchief which hung from the brass bolt of the nearest open porthole. "I went through the devil's own time last night," he resumed with nervous haste. "And all today—and I'm pretty shaken. But I got away with my life and my property, and I'm satisfied."

"Got away with your life!" repeated Dunham, keen at once. "Why, what was the trouble?"

"I'll tell you all about it. I'm glad you saved that boat of mine. Most skippers wouldn't have taken the time. I need it for evidence. It's got bullet holes in it."

"Who fired on you?" demanded Dunham.

Clifton did not reply at once. He puffed at his cigar, took it from his teeth and looked about him at the open doors and portholes, as if he feared listeners might be hanging about.

"You're all right aboard here," soothed Dunham. "Only one passenger, and Gibbins is—safe."

"Did you know him before you sailed from—where did you sail from?"

"Sandakan, and Borneo ports. Loaded from S'pore. No, I never met Mr. Gibbins before he came aboard."

"Oh, Gibbins is all right, sure," declared Clifton. "I'm all shot to pieces. I came within an ace of being robbed and murdered. And if you hadn't picked me up, they'd probably got me tonight."

"Who do you mean?"

"The outfit in the pearling lugger I sailed in from Thursday Island."

HIS EYES rested on a small safe built into the woodwork beside the skipper's desk. The steel door, with its old fashioned keyhole, seemed to fascinate Clifton. There was something in his eyes

which suggested an entirely new idea, as if the safe had brought to mind a latent worry.

Captain Dunham closed the door leading out on deck, and the door which opened to his bedroom on the other side. Then he resumed his seat before Clifton.

"From what you've been saying, you'd better get some word away to the police of nearby ports," urged the captain.

"I feel a lot better just seeing that safe," said Clifton. "Man, it looks good to me!"

"What's my safe got to do with it?"

"A lot. I've got a belt around me that's packed with a small fortune, and I can use that safe. My name didn't seem to mean much to you, Skipper." He suddenly bent forward and grinned at Dunham.

"Your name seems familiar, but I don't quite place you, Mr. Clifton."

"If I hadn't shot my face off the minute I came over the side of your ship, I'd have given a false name."

"What necessity for giving a false name?"

"Because my own name is dangerous to me. And I'm supposed to be dead—since night before last. It would serve my purpose better in catching that gang of wolves who nearly finished me off, if they didn't know I got away alive. You see, Cap'n, I'm Clifton, the pearl buyer. I finished buying up the best of the season's take, and I slipped away from Thursday Island in a lugger owned by a man named Anders. I wanted to get to Port Moresby on the quiet, for fear of being robbed, and I trusted Anders. I think his chink cook was in with him, but I can't be sure. They killed the native diving boys after they thought they had me, but I got away by the skin of my teeth, and hid on a small island until I saw you. They shot at me all last night, run the lugger ashore and burned it when I hid."

Dunham rose to his feet and reached for an electric button.

"This is a case that ought to be reported to the authorities without a moment's delay, and I'll—"

Clifton held out a restraining hand.

"Wait! Give me a chance to do a little thinking. My judgment ain't any too good just now. But it strikes me that if Anders thinks I'm done for, he'll give out some yarn to account for my death, and when he's lied himself into a hole, the only way he'll get out of it is with a noose around his neck. I want that baby, and I want him bad."

"You may be right, but a little delay won't do any harm." Dunham sat down again.

"I know I'm right. If he hears I've been picked up, he'll skip. As I look at it, one of his other luggers was primed to pick him up, and for all I know he's back at Thursday Island now. Why tell him just what he'll want to know?"

"That's why you didn't want Mr. Gibbins to have too much information, I presume."

"Correct, Captain. I didn't want some stranger going ashore and shooting off his face. Anders must be kept in the dark until the authorities are ready to grab him. You and I will attend to the details when we're ready. For now, I want to put my stuff in your safe, and collect me up some sleep."

He unbuckled his holsters and laid the pistols aside on the cushions. Then, loosening his shirt, he drew out a wide belt of chamois skin, which was divided into a series of pockets topped by flaps which were secured by snaps.

"When I go out on a buying trip, I carry a couple of hundred thousand dollars, and buy for clients on commission. I've close to half a million dollars in this belt, counting what I've got on my own investment. That's why I want no advance information on where I am, seeing I've got this collection on me. Anders was the last man I expected would take a chance, because he's owner of several luggers, but a mess of pearls like this will turn the head of a man who's generally pretty honest."

As he talked, Clifton opened a compartment of his belt and from a piece of black silk he removed an almost spherical pearl.

"Look at that!" he went on, as he set the pearl in Captain Dunham's palm. "Consider the whiteness of it—and the shape! Only the Torres Banks produce that sort of pearl—and then once in a dog's age."

Captain Dunham gave a whistle of awe as he held the pearl up to catch the gleams from the bulkhead electric light.

"A nice little pocket piece," he conceded. "I'd not want to get caught around Borneo or Australia on a dark night with just this one, Mr. Clifton."

Clifton laughed.

"There are plenty of knives kept sharp just for the purpose of picking those out of my clothes. And I've a total of twenty-two nearly as good, not to speak of the small stuff."

From the same pocket of the belt the pearl buyer took another ball of black silk, and from it revealed three more pearls of various sizes. He rewrapped the first pearls he had shown, and placed the black silk package back in the proper pocket of the belt. And as Clinton displayed in rotation his entire lot, Captain Dunham's amazement grew with the accumulating wealth and beauty of the belt's contents.

Clifton was mildly amused at the skipper's attitude.

"You thought I was doing some tall talking when I said I had a half a million or so on me, hey Cap?"

Dunham grinned.

"Tall talk in the pearl country is no new thing to me, Clifton. To tell the truth, after seeing what you've got with you here, I don't wonder that Anders tried to kill you—and you were mighty lucky to get out of the jam alive."

Clifton leaned forward, and met Dunham's eyes.

"You can hardly doubt the value I've placed on the stuff. You must know something about pearls."

"Oh, I know the real stuff when I see it. You said something a minute ago about the best of the take down here. You've grabbed off the choice pickings—and just looking at it gave me the shakes."

"Shakes! What do you mean?" demanded Clifton swiftly.

"If you want me to stick an oar into your affairs, I'd say you're considerable of a damned fool to be loose in luggers in these waters without a couple of bodyguards. I'm a fairly honest man, but pearls like those—and plenty of 'em—make a man think of having 'em in London or New York and living soft the rest of his life."

Clifton laughed softly.

"You've said it! If there's a drop of pirate blood in a man, pearls have a way of bringing it to the surface. There's always a rope involved with pearls—ever think of that, Skipper? For every woman wearing a rope of my stuff, there's been many a man with a rope of another brand around his neck before the pearls get into polite society. Anders'll get hung for killing natives to hide his attempt to kill me, you'll see."

"Damn pearls, anyhow!" exploded Dunham suddenly. "They seem to drive men crazy."

"Why, you're not worried, to have 'em aboard?" asked Clifton abruptly.

Dunham shook his head.

"Not a bit. But I don't wonder that my antiquated old safe looked good to you."

"You've got my viewpoint, now that you've seen the pearls," laughed Clifton. "Worn out for sleep, I can pound my ear in comfort knowing that the stuff is under iron and the key in your pocket." He rose, and with the wrapped belt held close to his shirtfront, he sat on his heels before the safe. "Come on! Let's put the babies to bed, Cap!"

Dunham opened a drawer and took out a big brass key. Clifton, still squatting before the safe, turned his head to look round at the portholes, as if he suspected that somebody might be trying to look in.

Dunham inserted the key and opened the safe.

"I'm the only man you need worry about now," he joked. "That belt in your hand represents more money than I'll earn in a thousand years."

Clifton gave a thin cackle of laughter.

"That's all right, Skipper! You steal 'em, and you'll be easy to catch. But now you understand why I didn't want your passenger to be in my confidence."

"That was natural enough," said the captain, as he took the treasure from Clifton's hand, pulled open the steel drawer inside and thrust the belt into the compartment. "But you don't need to worry about Mr. Gibbins. He's not getting off at Noumea, to stop that is, but he expects to go back to S'pore with me. That's the order I expect for the ship at Noumea—a charter for S'pore."

CLIFTON stood up as Dunham turned the key of the safe door. The captain offered the key to the pearl buyer.

"Perhaps you'd feel a lot safer if you had this under your pillow."

Clifton gestured the key away.

"Hell, no! That's just what I don't want! If anybody wanted the pearls now, I'd be knifed for the key. You're holding the sack for me now, and I intend to do some heavy sleeping."

He dropped back on the sofa for a minute, rubbing his hands across his eyes. "I've held myself together until I had everything secure. But man, I'm ready for shut eye!"

Dunham threw the key down on his desk.

"You can sleep your head off, Mr. Clinton."

"Where will you stop on your way back to S'pore from Noumea?" he asked.

"That's hard to say. But I can let you off at Thursday Island, if you don't want to leave in Noumea."

"I'm not going into any French penal colony with these pearls, you can bet on that!" declared Clifton. "A British port, that's what I want. I'll get off at Thursday Island. I'm going to make sure that Anders is caught before I go home. I'll teach that beggar to give me the scare he did—and kill his crew. I'll stick until I see him hived behind bars!"

"Oh, you're right on that point," agreed Dunham. "Anders can't be allowed at liberty in these waters, to play that sort of game, and the authorities will—"

There was a tattoo of fingers on the lattice of the air door.

"Who's there?" demanded Dunham.

"Grafton, sir. Message."

"Oh, all right," said Dunham. "My wireless operator," he explained to the startled Clifton.

The skipper opened the door an inch, and a yellow slip of paper was thrust inside. Dunham locked the door again and stepped to the nearest electric bulb. He read swiftly, then handed the yellow slip to Clifton.

"There you are—the news that you're dead is out on the air."

Clifton scanned the penciled words. He read aloud, in a low voice:

> TO ALL VESSELS EASTWARD OF TORRES STRAIT: WORD HAS JUST REACHED PRIVATE WIRELESS STATION AT GREVILLE, THAT CLIFTON, PEARL BUYER RECENTLY AT THURSDAY, HAS BEEN ROBBED AND MURDERED IN A LUGGER TO THE SOUTHWARD OF WATAWARI REEF, NIGHT OF FOURTEENTH. ANDERS, MASTER OF LUGGER, SHOT TWO BLACK DIVERS, REST OF CREW MISSING. VESSELS ASKED TO WATCH FOR BOAT WITH CHINESE BELIEVED TO HAVE PEARLS OF DEAD MAN. MAKE REPORTS DIRECT TO SHORE STATIONS, OR RELAY ANY NEWS TO X3XC FOR NAVAL OFFICIALS.

"I'm very well damned!" exclaimed Clifton. "That's Anders reporting, understand. And he's trying to hang my supposed death on the chink! And says he shot divers to protect me! Can you beat that for cold nerve!"

"We'd better report at once—in confidential code—and have the authorities take him into custody," suggested Dunham.

"We might do that," agreed Clifton. "But I prefer to remain dead. I want my

pearls in government protection before anybody knows where I am. Besides, he'll go back to Thursday Island—and I want him grabbed there. Just now I need sleep."

Captain Dunham touched a bell. In a minute a Chinese boy was scratching at the door. Clifton held out a hand to the captain.

"I'm mighty obliged to you, Skipper. I'll make things right with you—later." Captain Dunham shook hands and, after giving the Chinese boy orders for Clifton's comfort, saw the rescued man depart with the steward.

There was a smile on Captain Dunham's face as he glanced at the telltale compass on a little shelf near his desk. Then he bent over the chart and hummed a gentle tune. He was thoughtful, yet amused, as if picking up pearl buyers held something of a sly joke. He could hear Clifton's voice faintly down in the saloon as the pearl buyer talked to the Chinese steward. And the captain twisted his head to listen.

Dunham's attention was not held by the murmur of Clifton's voice; the captain was listening to a sound outside the open, but curtained, porthole which was intended to give a view of the foredeck below. A narrow passage with a rail running athwartship was just outside. Somebody was moving there, quietly. Suddenly the captain thrust a hand forward and snatched the curtain aside. The beam of light penetrated the outside darkness. There was nothing to be seen in the limited range of vision. Before Dunham could get his face close to the porthole the lurker had moved swiftly aside. The next instant there came a soft tapping at the door on the starboard side.

"Yes. Come in!" called the captain.

It was the same door through which Clifton had left the double room. Gibbins stuck his head in.

"Can I have a word with you, Skipper?" he asked. "Something private—and confidential."

"Sure! Barge along inside, Mr. Gibbins." Dunham's voice was hearty. There was no doubt of his welcome. "I've been expecting you," he went on. "I've got a few things to speak of myself."

"Is—Mr. Clifton coming back right away?"

"He's turning in for the night for a double watch sleep."

Gibbins entered and closed the door behind him. And he secured the bolt. He gave the captain a searching look, smiled a little in a vague and knowing way, and then let his eyes rest on the big brass key of the safe on the corner of the desk. And there was a pointed significance in the way Gibbins stared at the key.

"I've just been taking a turn around the deck, and I saw Mr. Clifton go below with the No. 3 boy. I was just—passing by—when you pushed the curtain of the porthole aside."

Captain Dunham smiled, and passed the lacquered box with cigarets. "Yes. You went past—swiftly," said Dunham. His voice held a sly dryness of tone.

GIBBINS coughed to cover a momentary embarrassment. Then, when he saw that Dunham was still grinning good naturedly, the passenger remarked—

"You're of the opinion that I was listening."

"Opinion my eye!" said Dunham. "I know you listened, at least, along toward the last of it."

Gibbins struck a match to light his cigaret, but let the flame burn to his fingers. He blew it out. He seemed unable to go on with the conversation.

"Come now!" urged Dunham. "You wanted to talk to me. Out with it, Gibbins." He laid a friendly hand on the passenger's arm.

"I'm not so sure I want to get my fingers gummed in this pie," said Gibbins. "We've got along fine, and I like you, Skipper. So what the hell is it to me if something's going on that I don't have to worry about?"

"What's there to worry about?" asked Dunham.

Gibbins did not reply. His eyes strayed again to the brass key.

"Nothing for me to worry about—but I'm not so sure about you, Captain."

Captain Dunham sank into his swivel chair. "Sit down, Gibbins. You and I have hit it off well, and nobody can make trouble between us—or worry us, either. But you know a lot more than you want to discuss. That it?"

Gibbins nodded and sank back to the cushions of the transom. His knees were not a foot from the swivel chair. The men spoke quietly.

"I don't want this chap to put anything over on you, Skipper, that's all," said Gibbins. "You're capable of taking care of yourself, but there's a chance that you might be misled."

Dunham turned his sharp and shrewd eyes upon his passenger.

"You tell me anything you like, and I won't bite you. And don't think I'm too smart to listen to a friendly tip."

"There are a couple of bullet holes in the side of that boat we picked up." Gibbins looked straight into the challenging eyes.

"Well, what do you make of *that?*" asked Dunham.

"Nothing. It's not my business to make anything of it. I just wanted to make sure that you knew."

Dunham considered a minute.

"You've noticed the brass key to the safe, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have," admitted Gibbins. "And I know Clifton put something in your safe. Have you any idea of what it happened to be that he put away?"

"I know all about it, saw the whole thing with my own eyes," said Dunham.

"I'm not prying into Clifton's private affairs. He has good reasons for privacy. I'm trying to get something across to you—and you don't have to make any comment. What I'm really talking for, is to make sure that he plays fair with you. I happen to know how that gentleman makes a living; and don't you get into danger for him."

"How the devil could I get into danger? You mean he's a criminal, and—"

"No, no!" expostulated Gibbins. "I'm not saying a word against Clifton's honesty. I know nothing against him—and his reason for misleading you might be legitimate enough. Just the same, the danger might be greater than you suspect."

"Now, what in the devil are you driving at, anyhow?" demanded Dunham.

"Clifton put something in your safe. If it was as valuable as it should be, under the circumstances of the man's business, you wouldn't let that key lay around so carelessly."

Dunham laughed.

"Nonsense! The key's all right. Only my Chinese boy and the mates get in here—and yourself."

"Certainly the key's all right," agreed Gibbins. "I didn't say anybody would lift it and rob the safe. I'm simply talking about the curious fact that Clifton put something of considerable value into your safe. You may not know the value—and I base that last statement on the carelessness you show with the key."

"You saw, or heard, us talk about what was put in the safe."

"I did not," said Gibbins. "I did hear a little, because I was curious to see if Clifton was lying to you."

"Then how the devil do you know anything about the value of what's in the safe?"

"Because I happen to know Clifton by sight. He's a pearl buyer who makes two trips a year to Thursday Island. I wondered if he told you that. He must have pearls on him. If he didn't tell you so, that's something for you to think about. I just don't want you fooled, understand?"

Dunham nodded. He was thoughtful for a few minutes, while Gibbins smoked in silence. Finally the skipper, as if he had made a decision, reached over and grasped Gibbins by the arm. The strength displayed by Dunham made the passenger wince from pain.

"I know I can trust you," said Dunham, "because you've made it your business to protect my interests."

"Clifton's interests are nothing to me, Skipper. I'm satisfied if you know what's going on."

"He told me how he happened to be alone in that boat," said Dunham. "And, he's held nothing back, because he told me why his boat has bullet holes in it."

"Good! Then, I'd say, he has pearls with him." Gibbins concealed his eagerness for more definite information.

The captain stared at a light for a moment.

"Your sticking up for me, Gibbins," Dunham began slowly, "warrants my taking you fully into my confidence. I'll not be telling you much that you don't know. Look at this wireless message I've received." He handed Gibbins the yellow slip of paper.

Gibbins read silently, his interest growing as he grasped the meaning of the sentences. When he had finished he looked up and met the skipper's eyes. Presently the passenger whispered—

"Then he got away—with his pearls?"

Dunham nodded and gestured toward the safe.

"They're in there, and worth a half million dollars."

Gibbins twisted his lips into a silent whistle.

"Have you sent a message out reporting that Clinton is aboard here?"

"No, and I'm not going to."

Gibbins began to laugh quietly.

"What strikes you as being so funny?" asked Dunham.

"I was just thinking of certain possibilities in the case," said Gibbins, serious again. "If Clifton never reached port again, nobody'd know the difference. Only the chinks in the crew heard Clifton give his name, and it meant nothing to them."

"I get the drift," said Dunham. "And so far—I've not written anything in the log book about the rescue."

Gibbins raised a hand swiftly.

"Look out, Captain! A half a million in pearls are mighty dangerous toys!"

Dunham laughed.

"You don't think I'd steal his pearls, do you?"

"There'd be more than stealing involved. While Clifton is reported dead, you'd have to kill him to take over his property." And Gibbins threw up his hands to express the horror induced by his words.

"Now, look here!" said Dunham curtly, "you started the idea yourself, when you said nobody'd know the difference if Clifton never reached port."

"It never occurred to me that you'd take the idea seriously," said Gibbins.

"You're the one taking it seriously, Gibbins."

"Put that key out of sight," said Gibbins.

Dunham turned and picked up the brass key from his desk. He pulled out a small drawer.

"This is where I keep the key—and only you and I know where it is. I'll be on the bridge most of the night, because we're in dangerous waters."

"Dangerous waters!" exclaimed Gibbins. "You said a lot then, Skipper—with a half a million dollars under your bridge."

Dunham closed the drawer and opened the door to the deck. In the darkness he again grasped Gibbins tightly by the arm.

"I like you, Gibbins. Come up to the chartroom; but drop this subject. I don't want the mate to hear too much."

"Dunham, forget these pearls," whispered Gibbins. "They have a way of driving men crazy. Don't forget your mate, the wireless man, your chief engineer—you'd never beat the game."

Dunham did not reply. They went up to the chartroom.

II

WHEN Gibbins went to bed a little after nine o'clock that night, Clifton was snoring in his stateroom in the starboard side of the saloon. Captain Dunham remained on the bridge, suddenly very much concerned about his course, for as he had said

earlier in the evening, he was in dangerous waters. And Dunham, after going to the chartroom, refrained from discussing Clifton or the affairs of the pearl buyer. It seemed to Gibbins that the captain had come to some decision about Clifton, and then abandoned whatever idea was in his head; it was apparent to Gibbins that Dunham wanted to think matters over before speaking his mind.

As the passenger left the bridge, he noted that the door of the captain's room was open a few inches, secured by an outer hook. It was the door to the room containing the safe.

Gibbins discovered early that he could not sleep. The *Mangareva* was still pounding into a heavy swell from the northeastward. And the Chinese boy, who remained on duty in the saloon to answer any bells and to provide coffee for the watches, polished brass on the stairway. Clad in pajamas, and his feet bare, Gibbins stepped from his cabin to the saloon table and asked the Chinese to fetch a bottle of mineral water. By the time the steward had brought the bottle, Gibbins was smoking in the social hall and looking out over the sea through the open door. The door to the captain's room was only about six feet away.

Gibbins went down to the saloon and drank the water. He then returned to his room and went to bed. But Clifton, snoring with an amazing efficiency, was a disturbing element. Gibbins got up again and went on deck for a walk. He was only gone a few minutes. When he returned to the saloon he sat in a swivel chair at the dining table and smoked several cigarets. Until three o'clock in the morning he did not go back to bed. By that time the Chinese steward was accustomed to the wanderings of the sleepless passenger and gave little heed to his coming and going. Twice the boy had brought coffee from the pantry.

When he finally returned to his room and locked his door behind him, Gibbins was wearing his white coat over his pajama jacket. He took it off before turning on the electric light, but instead of hanging the garment up, he rolled it and placed it under the light blanket on his berth.

Snapping on the light, Gibbins stood several minutes. He seemed to be in a quandary. He ran his fingers through his hair, turned his head to listen to the snores of Clifton, and craned his neck to peer upward at the ventilating grille over his door, as if pondering the possibility of the Chinese steward's ability to look into the cabin.

The pitching of the steamer made him put his elbows over the outer berthboard to maintain his balance. He seemed reluctant to climb into the berth. He threw back the light blanket and fumbled through the pocket of his rolled coat.

His fingers brought out several pearls, along with a piece of black silk. Reaching into the pocket again, he drew out more pearls and pieces of silk. When he had nested all the pearls in a depression of the mattress, he took a spare shirt from his suitcase, rolled each pearl into the fabric separately, and placed the bundle in his suitcase.

Again he listened. The Chinese boy was still at his polishing. Clifton was still snoring. Certain that he could not have been observed, he placed the suitcase under the lower berth, snapped off the light and climbed into his berth. He did not leave until the second breakfast gong. By that time the mates and the chief engineer had finished their meal. And Clifton was blowing and splashing in the shower bath under the stairway to the social hall.

Captain Dunham was just sitting down at the head of the table when Gibbins appeared, fully dressed.

"How'd the old sea dog sleep?" hailed the skipper cheerily at sight of his passenger.

Gibbins made a face. He looked a trifle drawn, almost haggard. He waved a disgusted hand toward the shower bath.

"He got *his* sleep, and I paid for it," he grumbled. "Been up half the night, knocking around here with the steward, and walking the deck. I don't believe I slept a full hour."

"That's tough luck," said Dunham. "But you'll feel a lot better when you've tucked a little Java under your shirt."

Gibbins yawned and took his place at the captain's right. "Sing," he said to the table steward, "put two piece brandy in my coffee."

Clifton appeared from behind the stairway.

"Hello, there, Captain! 'Lo, Mr. Gibbins! I feel like a he-elephant this morning, but I hope I didn't keep anybody awake."

His round face, freshly shaven, was pinkish under the tan; his eyes were clear, and his wet hair stuck out from his head in dripping curls. He had nothing on but pajama trousers, and he was rubbing his shoulders with a towel.

"Here's one of your victims," laughed Dunham, pointing to Gibbins. "I was on the bridge all night, and I was lucky, at that."

"I'm awfully sorry, old man," said Clifton, pausing on his way to his room to address Gibbins. "I've been threatened with murder more than once for my snoring, and I certainly peeled off some sleep last night. I was pretty badly battered last night when I came aboard, but I don't want to be unclubby." He bent forward and grinned at Gibbins.

"That's all right," said the passenger. "Don't worry about me. I'm pretty well caught up on sleep, anyhow."

"Say, I've seen you before, I'm sure," said Clifton. "I felt that way last night, but I couldn't place you."

"You've probably seen me at Thursday Island. I'm there a couple of times a year on business—just going through, you know."

"Oho! That's it, eh? Thursday Island! Then I guess you've placed me—by my name, anyhow."

"You're the pearl buyer, aren't you?" asked Gibbins.

"You've got me!" exclaimed Clifton. "Ha-ha! Under the circumstances, I had my reasons for not wanting my business broadcast to strangers last night—and you can understand that."

"Certainly I understand, and no offense at all, Mr. Clifton. I'd 've done the same myself. Will you excuse me if I drink this coffee now? It's spiked, and I can't very well wait until you sit down."

"Go ahead!" declared Clifton heartily. "Be with you in a minute."

He disappeared abruptly into his room, to return in a few minutes. Now he was clad in trousers, shirt and slippers. Rubbing his hands briskly, he sat down to the left of Dunham.

"What's all this talk about breakfast?" he demanded. "Give me room, and I'll show you what a man size breakfast ought to be."

Captain Dunham laughed.

"A little nap of twelve hours certainly does make a change in rescued pearl buyers, what?"

"DID YOU get anything more by wireless?" asked Clifton.

"Not a word all night."

"Fine! I've been thinking things over, Captain, and I don't believe I'll send out any message at all."

"You're the doctor," said Dunham. "Where do you intend to leave the ship?"

"Thursday Island—when you're on your way back to S'pore," said Clifton.

"Oh, so you're getting off at Thursday Island, eh?" said Gibbins.

"You don't like that, do you?" laughed Clifton. "You think you'll lose a lot of sleep, with me aboard."

"I can stand three or four nights of your snoring," retorted Gibbins as he grinned back at the pearl buyer.

"Three or four!" exclaimed Captain Dunham. "Why, that'll only take us to Noumea—and Clifton's coming back as far as Thursday with us."

"I'll be leaving at Noumea," said Gibbins.

Clifton met the skipper's eyes. But neither made any comment. Then Captain Dunham, after a long pause, showing by his tone that he was puzzled, turned to Gibbins and said:

"I'm sorry to hear you'll be leaving us. If you're afraid you can't sleep——"

"Sleep has nothing to do with my decision," said Gibbons. "I'm going to take a longer holiday than I intended when I bought a round trip ticket."

Captain Dunham finished his coffee hastily. He winked at Clifton, then rose from his chair.

"I'll be back in a few minutes, Mr. Gibbins," he said. Clifton followed the captain.

Gibbins watched the two men disappear through the social hall to the upper deck. There was a worried look on his face, as if he suspected that the sudden departure of Dunham and Clifton held something of danger for him.

Captain Dunham walked straight to his room. He opened the door and gestured Clifton inside.

"Say, why'd you give me the wink to follow you?" asked Clifton. "What's up, anyhow?"

"I'm not quite sure," said Dunham in a low tone. "But something happened during the night, and we'd better find out what—"

"You mean that you did get word—from the police—by wireless?" broke in Clifton. "Something that you didn't want Gibbins to hear?" Clifton was suddenly alarmed himself, and started to back toward the door.

"I have received nothing by wireless," insisted Dunham. "But Gibbins has some good reason for changing his plans and leaving the vessel at Noumea."

"What do we care?" asked Clifton. "Of course, I don't want to drive your passengers out of the ship with my snoring, but if he's crabbed because I'm aboard—"

"It means nothing to me at all," said Dunham, "at least in a money way. He paid for the round trip. And he has some other motive for leaving me beyond your snoring. As a matter of fact, Gibbins was out on deck last night while we were in here, and too close to a curtained port to suit me, while we were talking about your pearls."

Clifton laughed lightly.

"What if he was? He knew all the time I was a pearl buyer. And the pearls are in your safe. Don't worry your head over—"

"That man was on deck several times last night. The Chinese steward told me this morning. Besides, I was on the bridge, and I saw him moving around in the dark."

"Say, you can't believe that he tampered with the safe?"

"He might have. I never met Gibbins before he came aboard, and I don't like the fact that he has changed his plans to quit the ship at Noumea." Dunham turned serious eyes on Clifton, waiting to see what the pearl buyer would say next.

"We might as well go back to the table," said Clifton. "He'll suspect something if we—"

"He can suspect his head off," retorted Dunham. "Where are your guns?"

"Guns? What would I want with 'em?"

"Where are they?"

"I left 'em in my room, but—"

"Never mind. I want to have a look in the safe." He turned and opened a drawer of his desk, lifting out the brass key.

"The pearls are all right," insisted Clifton. "You're making a fuss over nothing."

"We'll make sure they're all right. Gibbins came here after you left last night, and though he said nothing against you in any way, he was most curious about what had happened to you in the boat."

"You didn't tell him about the pearls, did you?" asked Clifton.

"He knew you had pearls," evaded Dunham. "Lots of people who have never been dishonest in their lives, will go off their heads over a fortune in pearls. There's a madness about pearls and, as you said last night, pearls have a peculiar connection with ropes."

"Nonsense! Gibbins hasn't got my pearls! He's the only passenger aboard here, and he knows he'd never be able to leave the vessel once I made a roar. He's

too canny a man to try any stealing at this stage of the game, even if he wanted to steal, which I doubt. Any man with sense would wait until the night before we made some port."

Dunham paused before the safe and looked at Clifton.

"That's good reasoning," he admitted. "You're a pretty keen man, Mr. Clifton. But, remember, I'm responsible for the safety of your half a million or so." He inserted the key in the safe lock, and opened the door. "Fetch the belt out," directed Dunham, pointing to the compartment which held the treasure.

Clifton chuckled softly.

"You certainly don't intend to see me robbed, Skipper." He reached in, pulled out the rolled belt, shook it up and down to test its weight, and thrust it back into the compartment. "I told you the pearls were here. No need to get stirred up because—"

"Just a minute!" urged Dunham. "Let me see that belt!"

Clifton, startled by the captain's sternness, drew the belt out again.

"Why, you can't doubt—"

Dunham took the belt from the pearl buyer's hand and, unrolling the bulky chamois so the pockets were to hand, drew off a snap. He drew out a tiny square of black silk which was wrapped around a small sphere. He unwrapped the silk—and revealed a white pebble.

Clifton's legs collapsed under him, and he sat down abruptly on the transom cushions. He gasped out an incoherent word or two, suddenly aghast. When Dunham held forward the pebble, Clifton took it in his open palm. He stroked the stone with shaking fingers, then grabbed the belt from Dunham's hand and frantically tore open the row of pockets. Every bit of black silk contained pebbles in place of pearls.

"Cleaned!" he gasped. "The whole lot gone! And I thought your safe would hold 'em while—"

Dunham started for the door. Clifton grabbed at him.

"Don't show your hand now!" he pleaded. "If you accuse him, he'll throw my pearls overboard! We can't prove a thing—without the pearls in his possession."

Dunham drew back from the door.

"You're right. We don't want to jump to conclusions. We've no proof that Gibbins has 'em, except the fact that he's decided to quit the ship at Noumea."

"You can't arrest a man for that," said Clifton. "No, we've got to play a smooth game with Mr. Gibbins."

Dunham sat down in his swivel chair.

"It never occurred to Gibbins, as you were going to stay with the ship back to Thursday Island, that we'd miss the pearls."

"You are jumping to conclusions about Gibbins. I don't believe that he has my pearls."

Dunham looked startled.

"You don't?"

"Certainly not. Gibbins could be caught, even if he got away with my pearls. His old man started the business in S'pore, and Gibbins himself is known in every port out in these waters. He wouldn't have a chance against a wireless alarm sent out for him."

"Then who in the devil has got the pearls?" demanded Dunham.

"Who? Why, anybody else aboard the ship. Crew, engineroom gang, wireless operator, Chinese stewards—"

"Of course!" broke in Dunham. "We don't want to go off on the wrong tack about this business."

"Decidedly not!" said Clifton. "We want to keep this thing under cover. If word gets around that we've missed the pearls, I'm ruined. We've not a chance of shaking the pearls out of the clothes of the man who turned this trick. As I've warned you, the thief would throw the pearls overboard if we got too close on his trail. Good Lord, man! Not only would I lose the money I've invested for my clients, but I'd lose all my own capital! Naturally, I'm staggered at what's happened. But I've sense enough left to know that we've got to handle this

business with gloves, and keep the loss secret."

"Now don't worry," soothed Dunham. "Your pearls are aboard this vessel. I'll make it my business to get them. What's more, I know where to look for 'em."

CLIFTON rose to his feet. "Hey? What's that? You know?"

"Yes, I know." Captain Dunham's mouth had hardened into grim lines. His eyes bored into Clifton's.

"Then who's got 'em?" demanded the pearl buyer.

"For one thing," replied Dunham, "I'll lay a bet of ten to one that Gibbins has never been into my safe."

"What makes you so cockeyed sure?"

"I can't exactly say at the moment. But I don't believe that Gibbins has a single one of the pearls out of that belt."

A smile broke over Clifton's face.

"That is certainly good news for my ears, Captain!"

"What the devil difference does it make to you who has the pearls, if I get 'em back?" demanded Dunham.

"Difference!" Clifton was puzzled by the captain's question and the tone of his voice. Dunham seemed needlessly severe. "Why, no difference at all! What I mean is, that if you're so certain Gibbins hasn't got the pearls, you must be equally certain about who has got 'em."

"I know what I'm talking about, yes," agreed Dunham.

"Then who are you going to grab?" asked Clifton.

"I won't keep you in the dark about that very long," said Dunham. He pulled a small automatic pistol from his side jacket pocket and thrust the weapon against Clifton's shirt front, pressing him back against the bulkhead.

"What in hell does this mean?" spluttered Clifton.

"You've got your own pearls," retorted the captain. "I'm not the fool you think I am."

Clifton's mouth opened, shut, and opened again.

"Say! You've gone absolutely crazy!"

"The trouble with me, from your standpoint, is that I'm too damned sane to suit your purpose. The little game you've cooked up on me is to sue my owners for the value of your pearls—or, anyhow, for damages. Because they were put in my safe here, you think you can keep 'em and collect from the *Mangareva* company. That gag won't work. I'm not responsible, because you're not legally a passenger, and no responsibility attaches to me or the owners even if you lost a bushel of pearls in this steamer. That's something for you to think about, Clifton."

"You're talking a lot of nonsense, Captain Dunham."

"You'll find how much sense there is in it before we're done."

"You can't work this bluff on me, Captain."

"What d' you mean, bluff?"

"Somebody got into your safe last night, and—"

"How do you happen to be so sure somebody was in the safe?"

"My pearls are gone, and you left the brass key to the safe in the drawer of your desk. Somebody got hold of that key."

"Nobody opened that safe but myself," said Dunham.

Clifton's facial expression changed swiftly, as if he had just caught mentally at a solution of his troubles.

"That's about the truth of the thing, Captain Dunham," he began slowly. "Nobody—but—yourself!"

Dunham laughed in derision.

"Yes, I was waiting for you to pull that line of chatter, too. What you want to say is that I've got the pearls myself."

"Wouldn't it be fairly easy for you to deny that I ever brought a single pearl aboard?" demanded Clifton.

"Yes, it would," admitted Dunham. "There was no witness to what was in your belt—or that you ever put the belt into the safe at all."

"If I had intended to sue the company for loss, as you've just charged, I'd been

wise to make sure of a witness," said Clifton. "But I made it my business to make sure there was no witness."

Dunham considered a moment.

"That's reasonable, too," he admitted.

"It's much more reasonable than what you've accused me of—and it's equally reasonable that you've seen a chance to help yourself to my pearls."

"I might have 'em, at that," agreed Dunham with an amiability that was puzzling. "But you're going to have one hell of a hard time to hang the theft on me, Clifton."

"You said it, Captain. I know when I'm robbed. Perhaps you never intend to let me get ashore at all. I'm not in a position to give you much of an argument."

"No, you're not," said Dunham. "If I stole your pearls, I'm not likely to let you get out of the ship alive. You realize that, don't you?"

Clifton bit a lip. Yet he did not seem greatly concerned by the captain's suggestion of murder.

"You're just trying to get under my skin, Skipper. In the first place, it's crazy of you to accuse me, as you did, of having my own pearls. You could find that out by having my room searched, but you know better. I've not got my pearls. And as you've just remarked yourself, I could not prove I ever put any pearls in your safe—which means that you don't have to kill me. I'm no damned fool myself, either."

Dunham made no reply. He swept a hand behind him, still holding his pistol pointed at Clifton, lifted the whistle on the rubber tubing and blew into it.

"Mr. Larson!" he said presently. "Come below. And fetch the handcuffs from the chartroom. I've got him. Bring both pair. I'll probably chain him up here."

"Oh, so the mate's in on the game with you, is he?" asked Clifton. "Had the whole thing planned out, hey? That's just about what I thought! You were too damned eager to show me that my pearls were gone. I might have known there was a hocus in fetching me up here to convince me I'd been robbed."

"You've been robbed all right, no fear of that," said the captain. There were swift footfalls on the iron ladder leading down from the bridge.

Larson entered. There was no surprise in the blue eyes of the Swede as he saw that Clifton was covered by the captain's revolver. A pair of nickel plated handcuffs swung from a small chain, and as he turned to approach Clifton, the mate's back pocket revealed the gleam of a second pair.

"Are you going to let the skipper run you into jail on a bluff, or do you know that I've been robbed?" asked Clifton.

Larson did not answer. Neither did he show any surprise at the news that the rescued man had been robbed. The Swede was as coldly indifferent as if the master of the *Mangareva* had ordered something done in the regular routine of the vessel. One great ham of a freckled hand grasped Clifton's arm, the other hand thrust forward the cuffs. The locks clicked.

"I'll put the both of you behind the bars for this," said Clifton quietly. "You may not be responsible, legally, for the protection of my pearls, Captain Dunham. But you can be arrested for theft from your own safe."

"You stay here with him, Mr. Larson," said the captain. "If anything new turns up in the next few minutes, I'll send for you. When you come below, fetch him with you—and don't pay any attention to what he says."

"O.K. with me," said Larson quietly.

"You might go below and search my room," sneered Clifton. "Then you'd have no excuse for saying I had my own pearls."

"I'll have you present when I search it, and witnesses, too," retorted Dunham.

He opened the door, pocketed his pistol, and went on deck, to pass to the social hall and descend to the dining saloon.

Gibbins, still at the breakfast table, was smoking and reading over his coffee when Dunham returned to the saloon Dunham was smiling when he sat down.

He nodded, but did not speak. Gibbins set his book aside and waited a few minutes.

"What's up, Skipper?" he asked presently.

"Nothing of any importance," said the captain. "Hated to walk out on you, but I had to check up on the run."

"Why did Clifton follow you?" asked Gibbins.

"I didn't ask him." Dunham's tone was cool.

"Where is he?" pressed Gibbins.

"Oh, he stretched himself on the cushions in my room. He's still pretty tired. He's smoking one of my big Sumatran cigars."

Gibbins pushed his elbows well toward the center of the table, rested his chin in his hands and looked straight at Dunham, with a smile.

"Wants to be where he can keep watch on his precious pearls, I suppose."

"No, I'd say he just wants to be alone."

"Don't try to pull my leg, Skipper."

Dunham looked surprised.

"Nobody's pulling your leg."

"Seems to me that what passed between us last night would warrant a bit more confidence from you. I know something is wrong."

"Could you hear anything that Clifton and I said in my room a few minutes back?" demanded Dunham.

"No. I'm not spying on you, or Clifton."

"Then I'll tell you. Clifton's pearls are gone."

Gibbins lost his smile. His eyelids quivered. He lifted his head and his hands fell limply to the table cloth.

"No!" he gasped.

"I'm not talking for the fun of it," said Dunham coldly.

"This is a damned serious proposition, Captain," said Gibbins.

There was no doubt about the passenger's earnestness. He was aghast at the news. His fingers shook, and his eyes were filled with a suggestion of frank horror.

"You don't need to tell me that," said Dunham.

"Gone! A half a million in pearls!" said Gibbins in a mumbling of incoherence. He kept staring at the captain. "I told you—last night—danger!" went on the passenger.

"Now, look here," said Dunham. "I know what's in your mind. Clifton mentioned it himself. You think I've got 'em."

"I do not!" exclaimed Gibbins. "No, Captain! Please don't think I'd accuse you for a minute!"

"I'm glad to hear you say that," said Dunham. "I'll admit I had a thought of the possibilities, under the circumstances, just as you did."

"He must've made one hell of a row," said Gibbins.

"He didn't believe they were gone," said Dunham. "And he did make a row when I convinced him that his belt was cleaned of pearls, and in place of 'em a lot of nice white pebbles such as people make sea beaches out of."

"Where the devil did pebbles come from?" asked Gibbins.

"I don't know. Fact is, somebody was pretty well prepared to lift those pearls. In the dark, or a bad light, a man might even look at those pebbles and mistake 'em for the real stuff."

"That's right," admitted Gibbins.

But he was not especially interested in what the captain said. Gibbins seemed to be thinking something over on his own account. Presently he turned and looked up toward the social hall.

"I'd expect him to be tearing around the ship, making a fuss. Why doesn't he come down again?"

"Oh, he knows he won't lose his pearls," said Dunham.

"Hey? What's that?" demanded Gibbins, startled.

"I don't know his game," said Dunham quietly. "He demanded that I search his room."

Gibbins showed puzzlement.

"His room? What for?"

"I told him he had his pearls hidden somewhere."

"Hidden? What in the devil would he hide 'em for, after putting 'em in your safe?"

"He's the only man who could answer that question," said Dunham.

Gibbons frowned, puzzled.

"But—to hide his pearls—he'd have to steal 'em himself from your safe?"

"That would be easy, if he laid hands on the key, wouldn't it?" asked Dunham, leaning forward and peering into the passenger's eyes.

"But why steal his own pearls?" persisted Gibbins.

"You don't believe he stole 'em?" asked Dunham.

"He couldn't. I was awake most of the night. Clifton never left his room. The Chinese boy on duty all night could verify it."

"Yes, that's true," admitted Dunham. "But I can't see why you argue against my belief that Clifton has his pearls."

"Just this!" said Gibbins sharply. "I was on deck several times last night. If you believe that Clifton got hold of the key to the safe, you're as likely to suspect that I stole the pearls. It's a lot more logical for you to suspect me than Clifton."

"Nonsense!" exploded Dunham. "Certainly, having heard me suggest the possibility of robbing Clifton, and objecting to the thought, I'm not going to suspect you of doing what you warned me against."

Gibbins shook his head doubtfully.

"You'll bring me into it, I'm afraid. It would be a serious charge, of course; but I can see that I'll be under suspicion."

"Not if I make Clifton come across with his pearls."

"You can do it, if he's got 'em. But to settle your mind so far as I'm concerned, I want you to search my stateroom."

Captain Dunham broke into laughter.

"I won't do anything of the sort."

"But, if you haven't made Clifton dig up his pearls before we get to Noumea, I'll be searched by those confounded French in that port." Gibbins was still gravely worried.

"Don't you worry about the French police."

"All right. You'll have to protect me, then."

"I'll have the pearls by that time," said Dunham.

"All very well to say," grumbled Gibbins. "But every man aboard this vessel will be under suspicion—including yourself. And those Frenchies will count every feather in our mattresses."

"Why not let 'em?" questioned Dunham. "I haven't got the pearls, you haven't—and I'll back you up on that."

"Who the devil got hold of that key? I'm assuming, of course, that your theory about Clifton stealing 'em himself is all wrong."

"The key was used," said Dunham, pondering. "Proof of that is the fact that the safe was locked again after the theft. It proves that the lock wasn't picked and relocked by the picker."

"Yes," agreed Gibbins. "Picked locks are generally left picked. The key was used, of course. That's just what I don't like about the business, considering the fact that I was fool enough to go on deck several times last night—and that damned safe full of pearls."

"Don't worry. Clifton is going to come through. He's up in my room—under charge of the mate—and handcuffed."

GIBBINS' face revealed his consternation.

"Man!" he exclaimed. "If you're wrong about your idea that Clifton has his pearls, you're in a devil of a jam! He'll make you sweat for—handcuffs."

"He has no rights as a passenger," replied Dunham easily. "Besides, I don't intend to let him run around the vessel, yelling about being robbed and bawling you out."

Gibbins stood up. His face reddened swiftly.

"You don't mean that he's mentioned my name as a thief?"

"Sit down, old man," said Dunham. "The only thing that came up in connec-

tion with your name was your reason for wanting to leave the ship at Noumea."

"He asked that, did he?"

Dunham nodded.

"Damn his skin!" raged Gibbins. "My reason for deciding to leave you at Noumea was because I was afraid something would go wrong with his damned pearls! That you, or Clifton, would be knifed, and I've been worried." He was still on his feet.

Captain Dunham stood up.

"Yes, it is a mean business, Gibbins," he said soberly. "And things could be made to look bad for you."

"As a matter of fact, you're suspicious of me," said Gibbins. "I can see by your face, and tell by your voice, that you're inclined to believe that I know more than I do."

Dunham drew his hand from a side pocket of his uniform jacket. He thrust a revolver toward the passenger.

"You have the pearls, Gibbins."

The passenger backed away a couple of steps. He was strangely cool, and seemed to have no fear of the weapon. Out of the corner of his eye he could see the No. 1 Chinese boy peering out through the partly open pantry door.

"What's the big idea with the gun?" growled Gibbins. "I told you that I wanted my stateroom searched, and now—"

"Don't you pull any fireworks, Gibbins," warned Dunham swiftly. "Keep your right hand away from your back pocket. I know you've a gun, and if you attempt to pull it, I'm ready to kill you where you stand."

"I see the game," said Gibbins quietly. "You've got the pearls, but you want to make me the goat."

"There's got to be a goat," said Dunham.

Gibbins smiled.

"Will you let me step into my room a minute, Skipper?"

"What for?" asked Dunham.

"For the pearls."

"You've got 'em, eh? How did you manage it?"

"I used the key." Gibbins shrugged.

Dunham grinned.

"Go ahead and get the pearls."

Gibbins stepped swiftly to his stateroom, opened the door and reappeared at once with his suitcase. He opened it on the table, unrolled the shirt and spilled the pile of loot out into a deep soup plate. He turned round, saw that the No. 1 boy had disappeared on a gesture from the captain, then threw a napkin over the pearls. Now Gibbins grinned at Dunham.

"There you are, Skipper. I never intended to hold out on you. You knew all the time I had 'em."

Dunham grinned back, and set his revolver on the table.

"I had my own ideas, of course. But I'm afraid, Gibbins, you intended to hold out on me, just the same. You figured that neither Clifton nor myself would miss the pearls until you were safe ashore in Noumea, at least—and perhaps that the *Mangareva* would sail away with both of us without being aware of the fact that you started a collection of pearls."

"No," said Gibbins quietly. "I just wanted to see how keen you were on who had the pearls. Just remember, I'd have backed up your theory that Clifton had his pearls, if I intended to keep 'em all myself."

"Sit down," said Dunham, with a wave of a hand toward the swivel chair nearest Gibbins. "Let's talk sense. We've got Clifton where we want him. Now what'll we do?"

"Split 'em up," said Gibbins, as he resumed his seat. "Or, what would be better, wait until we're ashore in Noumea, and split them. That leaves me holding the sack until you've got your share."

Captain Dunham considered the matter for a moment.

"I'd prefer that I hold the sack, and hold 'em all until the ship gets to Noumea."

"You're the doctor," said Gibbins.

"Put your suitcase back," said Dunham. He waited until Gibbins had obeyed the order, then pressed the button

on the table to summon the No. 1 boy. "Tell Mr. Larson to come below—and fetch Mr. Clifton," said the captain to the steward.

"What's that?" snapped Gibbins. "What do we want of Clifton?"

"I want to accuse him, before the mate, of having his own pearls. That'll throw Larson off the track of the game being played."

"Good!" said Gibbins. "Then lock him up, and we'll grab a steamer out of Noumea while he's still aboard here, before he can make any report of having lost any pearls."

DUNHAM held up a warning hand. Larson appeared at the head of the stairs, leading his manacled prisoner. Captain Dunham reached for his revolver, and Clifton gave a gasp of astonishment as he saw the weapon in the captain's hand.

"What are you doing with that gun?" asked Clifton angrily. He gave Gibbins an inquiring look, but the passenger ignored him.

Dunham did not aim the revolver at anybody, but let it rest on the table before him, holding the butt.

"Will you sit down, Mr. Clifton?" began the captain.

Clifton slipped into the first swivel chair in reach and laid his manacled hands on the cloth.

"I must apologize for the indignity I've subjected you to, Mr. Clifton. I was in doubt about where your pearls were when I handcuffed you. But I can restore your property."

Gibbins started up from his chair.

"Sit down!" commanded Dunham. He raised the weapon and aimed it at the passenger. "Mr. Larson," the captain went on, addressing the mate, "take that gun out of Mr. Gibbins' back pocket."

Larson strode around the table and disarmed Gibbins.

"What's this all about?" demanded Clifton.

"Gibbins has confessed," said Dunham.

"You've let me down!" cried Gibbins.

"Confessed what?" questioned the amazed Clifton.

"That he got your pearls, last night, by unlocking the safe."

A look of relief crossed Clifton's face. He leaned back in his chair and sighed deeply. Then he turned resentful eyes on Gibbins.

"So you were the bird who tried to get away with 'em?"

"You've got your pearls back, Mr. Clifton," said Gibbins. He reached over and pulled the napkin from the soup plate.

Clifton made no reply to Gibbins. Instead, the pearl buyer lifted his hands and spoke to the mate.

"Take these off," he commanded.

"Wait just a minute," said Dunham to the mate. "Put that extra pair on Gibbins first."

Mr. Larson obeyed, and Gibbins submitted without a protest. He seemed too stricken at the turn of events to be concerned with the irons on his wrists. The connecting chain was slipped through the arm of the chair, making him a prisoner.

"Will you get these damned things off me!" cried Clifton to the captain. "Have I got to sit around with these—"

"There is something more important at the moment," broke in Dunham. "I've told you that Gibbins confessed, but he's not done."

"Not done with what?" asked Gibbins.

"Confessing. There's a rope with these pearls, Mr. Gibbins. You may escape the rope, but you'll have to talk your head out of the noose, I can tell you that."

Gibbins lost color.

"What—are you driving at?"

"Murder," said the captain.

Clifton jumped up.

"Murder? Who was murdered?"

"A pearl buyer named Clifton."

"What the hell are you talking about?" snorted the pearl buyer. "I'm Clifton, and I'm still alive, ain't I?"

"You're still alive, yes," said Captain Dunham. "But it won't be long before Clifton, the pearl buyer, is dead."

Larson swung round and stared at the captain.

"You kill him? My God, you have gone crazy, Captain?"

"He has got something by wireless, and—" Gibbins checked himself abruptly.

"I told you there was more confessing to do, Gibbins. You've lied to me here all morning, and you might as well come across with the straight stuff now."

"Lied!" said Gibbins. "Didn't I admit that I had the pearls? Haven't I turned 'em over? What's the use of bothering about me any more? I'm caught, and you might as well turn Mr. Clifton loose, instead of—"

"Take these off my hands!" bellowed Clifton.

Dunham ignored the demand. Larson placed his powerful hands on the man's shoulders and forced him down into the swivel chair.

"You said you opened the safe and got the pearls," resumed Dunham, turning to Gibbins.

"I've confessed it, haven't I?" retorted Gibbins.

"You got hold of the key and took the pearls from Clifton's belt?" insisted Captain Dunham.

"I did," replied Gibbins.

"You're a damned liar!" said Dunham.

He pulled a brass key from his trouser pocket and threw it upon the table.

"That's the only key which opens my safe. I've had it in my pocket all night. The key I threw around so carelessly on my desk—and let you see me put in a drawer—will not open the safe."

Clifton drew his breath sharply.

"Keep your mouth shut!" he snapped to Gibbins.

"Yes, and probably hang," said Dunham. "Mr. Gibbins, you have not killed anybody. But what's the use of talking against what may have come by wireless during the night?"

"I told you he got a message!" screamed Gibbins at Clifton.

"Will you shut up?" bellowed Clifton.

"No, I won't!" retorted Gibbins. He turned to Dunham. "Captain, I didn't know what was going to happen when I sailed from S'pore with you. I was to meet this man aboard here when you picked him up—to smuggle pearls ashore at Noumea. I didn't know there was going to be a murder—but Clifton was killed. This man and Anders did the job—out in a lugger—and the boat you picked up waited for us to come along, was hiding on an island."

"I see," said Dunham. He turned and looked at the man who pretended to be a pearl buyer. But the supposed Clifton was bent forward over the table, his face on his handcuffed hands.

"I didn't know there was to be murder," Gibbins went on. "They told me it was only a smuggling job. This man was never going to tell you the safe was robbed. He was going to walk off the ship with his belt—after I'd got ashore with the loot."

Dunham nodded.

"I'll have to wire now to arrest Anders," said Dunham. "I knew you didn't want me to steal the pearls last night—and I knew when you said you admitted the theft that you lied—which meant the pearls must've been passed to you below here last night."

"That damned key!" cried Gibbins. "But why did you go up and look at the safe from breakfast?"

"I knew the pearls were gone before you went to bed last night," said Dunham. "I looked through the belt myself. As it was impossible that anybody had stolen the pearls, they must've been switched out of the belt when your pearl buying friend was showing them to me. You didn't want me to steal something not in the safe. I knew then that you and the other bird were not strangers. But it was the key that caught you, Gibbins . . . Lock 'em up in the lamproom, Mr. Larson."

LEGIONNAIRES IN AMERICA

By JOHN S. STUART

ON A SUNDAY early in February, if you had been among the curious who scan the usually pathetic little block of advertisements termed "Public Notices" in the Sunday *Times*, you might have come across the following:

> FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION—ANYBODY who once was a Legionnaire, before, during or after the war, without distinction of nationality or color, send address for important communication.

A name and an address on the upper West Side followed.

Now I was in the Legion once. True, I don't speak about it often. It stimulates too many questions; it seems almost too fantastic for some of my friends to believe; but the fact remains, I was in the Legion once.

My curiosity was aroused and that night, when Mac, my Scottish terrier, and I went out for our midnight stroll, we stopped at the mailbox on the corner and listened to the little click and soft thud as a letter started on its mysterious journey through the night.

A few days later I received this reply:

> *Cher Camarade:*
> For the first time in America a reunion of *Anciens Legionnaires* is organized.
>
> If you ever wore "the blue belt" on the battlefields of Algeria, Morocco, Syria, Tonkin, Madagascar or France, please come.
>
> Waiting for you will be many friends, more than you can think of, young and old, some who fought in Indo-China thirty-five years ago, some who are just coming back from Africa; but every one of them a Legionnaire, and more proud of it than of anything else in the world.

A date about a week ahead was indicated, with the address.

Algeria, Morocco, Syria—yes, I had been there. Tonkin—well, my boat had stopped in that far off port of Indo-China for a few hours, but I was not in the Legion then. I could count on the fingers of one hand the years since I carried a rifle and pack under the hot Algerian sun.

It is only fair to admit it was with a certain sense of misgiving I journeyed up Riverside Drive on the appointed evening. After all, was it a *bona fide* meeting? Was it possibly a new racket to extract money from unsuspecting souls? However, they would hardly pick Legionnaires for that. My finger hesitated even as I was about to ring the door bell, and I wished for one swift moment I had not come.

Then the door opened.

"*Salud, camarade!*"

A tall, well built man of perhaps forty-five greeted me. My misgivings vanished. I wonder now that I entertained them even for a moment. This man had been a soldier, no mistaking that. His square set shoulders and upright carriage bespoke many army years. His face was strangely like those of the bold, brave men who sail and fish along the Brittany coast. Square in shape with the hard blue, all-seeing eyes of a soldier, and a small, slightly waxed mustache—in any other climate but New York City it must have been bronzed by wind and sun. He wore no coat and his blue shirt was open at the throat.

"Welcome, m'sieu! Your name?" he queried as he took my hat and coat.

I told him.

We were now in a beautifully furnished room. I was the first to arrive. My host stepped over to his desk and picked up a list of many names and, turning to me, asked—

"Your regiment, m'sieu?"

"The First," I answered.

"Ah, the First!"

"Yes," I added, "Second Company."

"But we are one here. It was the same in the Legion. We do not show companies."

A bell rang somewhere in the apartment.

"Pardon, m'sieu—" as he excused himself—"we shall meet some more *camarades*."

In a moment he returned with two men.

The first was an American with the long, loose legged walk of a sailor and a necktie which might have been stolen from Joseph's coat. He had a gay, happy-go-lucky, devil-may-care attitude. I learned later he had transferred out of the Legion and is a reserve first lieutenant in the American Army.

The man with him was not a Legionnaire, but an aviator of the Lafayette Escadrille. He had known Legionnaires when they were transferred into the Lafayette Escadrille. It was hard to visualize in this professional business man, who had grown slightly rotund with the years, the romantic figure of the dashing young aviator.

After that the doorbell kept up its insistent clamor as more and more Legionnaires found their way to the rendezvous. In all about twenty-eight or twenty-nine men attended the meeting.

As I looked over the gathering, and listened to the half forgotten words of Legionnaire French, I could not help but feel that here were men who had been soldiers, who had known the grueling life of the barracks, the hardships of action on all the grim frontiers of Europe, Africa and Asia. As in any crowd of men there are bound to be some who stand out above the rest in personality, idiosyncrasies, dress or manner, perhaps you would be interested in some of my impressions.

But first I must pay my respects to our host and his hospitality. First there was Arabian tobacco, with which he provided cigaret papers . . .

I was particularly interested in one man who was eighty-two years old. He had enlisted in 1881 and seen service in Algiers, Morocco, Tonkin—indeed he was almost a walking history of the Legion. His hair was quite gray, but his small blue eyes, with a hint of hardness in them, were still full of life. What a fascinating thing it would be to sit and listen to this man tell of some of the things he had seen and done fifty years ago in the Legion!

My attention was constantly attracted by one rough hewn Frenchman of about forty-four, with a cynical laugh which he employed frequently. He had traveled everywhere and was still wandering; he spoke English, French and German with equal fluency; he had been a sailor. One would not like to cross him. He was full of Legionnaire anecdotes. He proposed innumerable toasts—Legionnaire toasts with a song and an oath at every drink. Our host had asked earlier in the evening:

"Messieurs, which shall it be? Wine or beer?"

Unanimously, the answer had been, "Wine!" After all, wine was slightly reminiscent of the *vin rouge* rations of Legion days. A huge pitcher was brought in and toasts were proposed to the absent ones, to those who would be with us at another meeting, and to those who would never be with us again. A phonograph record of the Legion march was played and every one, with a glass in his hand, kept tune.

THE MEETING was called to order, the purpose explained. It is hoped in this informal way to bring together all men now in America who have served in the French Foreign Legion.

Some one asked—

"What about deserters?"

A tense, painful hush descended on the room and men eyed each other warily. Our host tactfully announced:

"It matters not to us what a man was. The only fact that counts is that he was in the Legion. We will not ask questions.

We will not ask for discharge papers. After all, they can be forged and in fifteen or twenty minutes we will know whether or not a man is an imposter."

A delicate question had been settled and several men breathed sighs of relief.

Our host was elected president of the club and a quiet Bavarian of about fifty-eight was named vice-president. No treasurer or other officers were spoken of, and there was no question of dues. A date was set for a meeting the following month.

With another pitcher of wine the meeting became less general; groups of two or three began reminiscing by themselves. I found myself in the midst of a spicy discussion of the Arabs.

"Do you remember how the Arabs used to stand near their beds of straw and pick the cooties off—great big ones they were? . . ."

"Sure, I remember. I certainly remember. How many times would I curse them out. I called them everything from camel dung down. Why, I used to see them pick the cooties off, look at them, then, instead of stepping on them, throw them into the straw. Then they would go and sleep in that same straw."

It made me squirm to think of that sort of thing again.

There was talk of places visited—dangerous places, where an Arab would just delight to stick a knife between your ribs because, "after all, an infidel was always an infidel!" One would not say there was exactly a brotherly love between the Legionnaire and the Arab.

I got up to empty my pipe and walked into the thick of an argument between two men who had not seen each other for twenty years. Earlier in the evening they had fallen on each other's necks, but now they were heatedly discussing with old-time vigor, with vehemence and many gesticulations, various points of the uniform.

One man contended that the bayonet should be worn "slightly back."

"No, it should be right on the side, a little forward!" his opponent maintained. They argued back and forth, enjoying it immensely, but arriving at no definite conclusions.

Then the pants. One man said there should be a fold at the knee.

"No, they should be drawn tight with no slackness at the knee!"

This was too much for some of the other men, who had hung on the outskirts of the discussion.

Several shouted:

"They're both wrong! The pants should be . . ." and the meeting broke into an uproar. But the glasses were filled again and the matter forgotten.

Just before midnight the meeting broke up. Legionnaires departed in all directions—one had come from Bridgeport, one an hour's ride in Jersey, others from Yonkers and Brooklyn, many from Manhattan. Half a dozen or so of us started walking down Riverside Drive. Did I say "walked"? No, we marched four abreast, squad style, 132 steps to the minute. The only one to raise an objection was the aviator who had grown plump—

"I never was a foot soldier, anyway."

But he too fell into step, and seemed to enjoy it. The tall, loose legged American was always a little in the lead with his swaggering, sailor-like walk.

"Left! Right! Left! Right!" What more natural than that we should sing the marching song of the Legion. "Left! Right! Left! Right!" Our steps kept time for us and the crisp, cool night air stimulated the blood in our veins. Then we broke into Legion ditties, songs in the patois of the Legion, a too warm Arabian love song.

Part way down a cop shouted at us:

"Ah, shut up! Where the hell do you think you are?" Then he added, under his breath, "Damned foreigners!"

Hot Air

By

NEGLEY FARSON

SUFFICE it to give the opinion of No. X Squadron that if Major William Donovan—Missouri, U. S. A, 42 years, bachelor, Baptist, and five feet four in his flying boots—had been one-fifth the man on the ground that he was in the air, he would have made a top hole commanding officer. Add to this the presence of a slack, overhandsome, six foot Canadian flight sergeant, laboring under the *idée fixe* that nothing but the pettiness of his C. O. was preventing him from getting the commission he so richly deserved, and you have a first rate situation.

It was bound to make trouble, even in England, more in Cairo, but dead certain in a hole like Fort Rutbah, which is a hundred miles inside Iraqui territory.

The affair focused out of a pure fluke over which neither of them had any control. One of Donovan's most exasperating hobbies was stunt flying under particularly dangerous circumstances, especially the habit of spinning his bus down to within less than one hundred feet of the ground before jerking out to do a swish tail landing. He had been a school teacher in private life, and it was held in No. X that most of his cavortings in mid-air were the sheer swank of a little man who has suddenly discovered that, in one element at least, he is just as good as the biggest one.

On this particular morning, however, instead of coming out of the spin he had crashed. It looked like a sure write off for both of them. But when the racing Ak Emmas and officers of No. X got out to them they found Donovan standing up outside the pile rubbing his back, which he said he must have twisted, and Sergeant Sugarbread, who seemed quite all right, leaning against the wrecked fuselage. The doctor began to berate Donovan for taking such foolish risks.

"Don't be silly," growled Donovan. "You don't think I did that on purpose." And, by way of explanation, he held up a broken joy stick. "Why, I was damn lucky to get down at all. Had to land with my head in the cockpit."

Then it happened. During the amazed silence that followed Donovan's revelation there was a dull thud behind them and it was seen that Sergeant Sugarbread had fainted.

"Well, I never!" gasped the doctor.

"I was watchin' 'im, sir," said the efficient medical orderly, "an' when 'e 'eard the major explainin' things, sir, 'e come over all green, sir."

"Well, tote him off," said Major Donovan.

It was an unfortunate way of putting it, which, needless to say, lost nothing in the telling by joking N. C. O's when Sergeant Sugarbread woke up again. The major had merely wanted him taken out of the sun, but from the way Sugarbread got the story Major Donovan had spoken of him as so much dead meat.

"An' wots more, Sugar, ole dear, 'e said t' doctor, 'That bloke's got too much imagination. 'E scared 'isself to death!' "

It was an unbearable thing to have to put up with. There was no way of explaining to the politely smirking N. C. O's mess what that sudden sinking feeling at the pit of his stomach had done to him. How he had fainted before he could master it. And what was the use, anyway? These men were just a bunch of roughnecks. They couldn't understand such things. The trouble with them was they had no imagination at all. But there was one language they did understand, and Sugarbread used it.

That night as he was meditating desperately in the moonlight by the hangars, little Evan Davis came up to him.

"Indeed to goodness," said the little Welshman, "I don't see how you stand it."

"What's that to do with you?" demanded Sugarbread, least of all inclined to accept sympathy from this little rigger whom he thoroughly despised. But misery loved company.

"I will show you something—" the little Welshman winked—"if you will come into the hangar for a moment."

Sugarbread took a last look at the silvery desert, as if aware that following the man from Wales meant some change in his destiny, and then he entered the dark building. They were in there ten minutes and when they emerged again into the honest moonlight, the flight sergeant's handsome face was lined with doubt.

"I don't like it," he muttered. "It's a damn low nasty trick."

But the Welshman was magical.

"Listen, boy. You will never settle this otherwise, for the man is an officer—you're not his equal—and he takes advantage of that."

"Not his equal, eh?" The words were gall to Sugarbread. "Well, by Gawd, I'd just like to have a chance at it, to meet man to man!"

That, explained the little rigger, was forever prohibited by social restrictions of the British army.

"Besides," he said, "he will only be getting what is coming to him—and every one will say it was an accident."

NOW the chief task at No. X at that time was to guard the new R.A.F. survey in search of the camel Arabs who had taken to cutting up the motor transport. And Sergeant Sugarbread was on the tarmac even earlier than usual next morning to see that the dawn patrol got off all right. He gave the major an unusually sharp salute.

"Morning, sir."

"Morning, Sugarbread—how's the new bus?"

"Everything O.K, sir. Saw to it myself."

"You don't say." Donovan cut short a curt smile. "Well, hop in."

"*Me, sir!*"

Donovan nodded, and began to climb into the pilot's seat.

"But, Major—"

Sugarbread was looking helplessly about him as if searching for some hole to jump into. The major frowned and peered down at him. Obviously the flight sergeant must still be suffering from yesterday's crash. But there is one infallible flying rule for things like that—go up again at once.

"Get in!" snapped Donovan.

It was an order this time and Sugarbread obeyed like an automaton. The major opened up a few times: the Rolls roared like ten thousand devils; the Bristol tap-tapped across the sand and took the air . . .

Now the Arabian sun has seen some strange sights, but certainly no facial contortions more remarkable than when, an hour later, the brassy orb shone on the horrified visage in the back of that aerial chariot. Flight Sergeant Sugarbread, apparently, was silently having hysterics. Mouth open, eyes bulging, he peered down to where the vast mauve desert unrolled in a terrific expanse of sheer nothingness.

The major had cut off from the patrol some time back and headed straight southward, the plane droning monotonously in the direction where lie the secret cities of Arabia. Sugarbread waved his arms impotently. Once or twice he seemed to resolve to reach forward and tap the major, but each time he drew his hand back. And now, with an expression of Kismet, the flight sergeant had resigned himself. He sat there, staring fearfully at what rose like a rough blue sea in the heat haze ahead of them.

This, Sugarbread was aware enough of operations to know, was a patch of unexplored mountains that were supposed to be the sanctuary of the camel brigands. A mysterious mass. Practically zero visibility once the sun got to work had always made it impossible to reconnoiter them. The major, apparently, was going to have a shot at it . . .

Flying low, contour chasing, the plane hurtled over a formation that was like nothing else than a loathsome skin eruption. A scabrous morass where blisters of reddish hills were collected around pools of yellowish scum. And over this their engine conked out.

Sugarbread's heart heard it first—it always does, you know—and he had just a split second in which to admire the major's instant decision that saved them from crashing into a cliff face before he saw the yellow sands whirling up at him . . .

"Well," said the major, "that's that."

It apparently was. Sugarbread looked dully at the wreckage, wondering how he had ever come out alive again. Two crashes in two days was going too far. And this one had a most serious aspect to it. The camp was at least forty miles away, and they had been unfortunate enough to crash in a place notorious for its invisibility—and no one knew they were there.

"Foolish of me," admitted Donovan. "Ought always to leave word where you're going—especially with boneheads like you looking after the machines."

He was squatting imperturbably, sucking his empty corncob pipe that was famous from Cairo to Karachi. The major was trying to make out that this crash hadn't rattled him. Another bit of swank, thought Sugarbread. The major, it seemed, did not feel communicative. Rummaging about among the wreckage he removed the little sun topee kept in the cockpits for such an emergency, and he also retrieved the precious felt covered water bottle, which he hefted thoughtfully. Then he sat down in the shade of the wrecked wing and examined his right ankle which had already begun to swell noticeably. He appeared to have gone into a trance, just the sup of his dry lips on the pipe stem breaking his idol-like immobility.

As there was nothing better to do Sugarbread crawled in under the wrecked wing and sat down beside him. A temperature that quickly mounted to 130° Fahrenheit and the radiation from the metallic surfaces of the slopes made even his buttons feel hot as he touched them, and he crawled farther under the wing so

as not to expose himself any more than he had to.

Hours later—it seemed years—a dull drone announced the advent of an airplane searching for them. It floated hither and thither over the hills like a ranging dog. It passed directly over their heads, about two thousand feet up and, although they could see the observer—apparently looking down at them—he did not see them. When the Bristol had vanished amid the jumping heat haze it seemed as if the silence of death itself awaited them in the still, dust laden desert air.

The major knocked out his pipe and put it away.

"Well," he said, standing painfully, "that looks like the order to walk. We might stay here and chance it. They might pick us up tomorrow—and then again they might not. I certainly thought they'd see the bull's-eyes on that wing. If we stay here we'll only use our water up so we'd better start now."

"I'd like a drink," suggested Sugarbread.

"So would I."

But the major made no effort to give it to him and had already started down the *wadi* bed. It was heartbreaking progress—even for Sugarbread. Heading for a pool which he remembered flying over, the major left the comparatively easy going of the *wadi* and began to scramble up the steep, boulder covered slopes. Sugarbread followed.

They were trudging all the time on the edges of rounded stones which rolled away from under their feet until they stopped against larger rocks, climbing over great masses that seemed to have been piled on purpose to form a barrier against the sky. A slight wind was blowing, like a blast from a furnace; it burned their faces, hurt their eyes and parched their lips.

The pool, when they reached it, was a steaming, nauseous saline solution that would have meant sheer death to drink. In the first two hours they had progressed hardly a mile and a half.

THE RED DAWN of the next day found them on the edge of the tortuous hills, looking down with something akin to joy on the level desert expanses. But the sight of three black Arab tents held them back. Whether that signaled that they were near some water hole or whether the Arabs had it in goatskins, they could not know. In any case it was out of the question to try to find out.

Dropping back gloomily, they deliberately made a long detour along the concealment of another *wadi* bed. They had to walk on the edge of stones all the time, often for an hour or more, without once resting the soles of their feet on a patch of sand six inches square. It was with difficulty that the major forced Sugarbread to take these steps. The hopelessness of their snail-like progress had become apparent to both of them. Sugarbread did not wish to go on with it.

"We can't make it," he protested. "I'll bet you we haven't made ten miles all night." They had dropped once and slept for two hours as they lay. "We'll just wear ourselves out and die before we have to."

The major's narrowed eyes were again searching to where the horizon was lost in the heat haze of the desert. A landscape of terror, of hardship, of death, horrifying, though in a different manner from the infernal scenery they had been plodding through. Even night marches could not get them across that—not without water.

"I don't want to die either," admitted William Donovan. "I'm just telling you we've got to get as far away from these hills as possible. They hold the heat, somehow—you know what it was last night—and as soon as the sun gets up, anything here is invisible. I know we can't walk all the way back to camp—I can't anyway with this foot."

"Then what's the use?" demanded Sugarbread.

"About a fifty-fifty chance that we will be spotted in the desert."

Sugarbread's urgings that they return

and take a chance on the Arabs they had seen were effectually silenced by Donovan's curt description of what the Arabian women are allowed to do to amuse themselves with male prisoners.

"If you want to chance that—" Donovan grinned—"go ahead. I'm not having any."

But the barriers of rank were already beginning to break down. The smallness of the little five foot four major, plus his injured leg, was beginning to make Sugarbread conscious of at least a physical superiority in this fix they were in. If he wanted to, he could walk off and leave the major right there. But then the major had the water bottle . . . And that was just the point; the way the major talked to Sugarbread about that coveted water bottle you might have thought the six foot flight sergeant was a child. The number of hours, for instance, a man might carry on without drink—provided he make himself stop thinking about it. The power of mind over matter . . . According to the little major, Sugarbread only *thought* he needed a drink.

"But, damn it!" flared Sugarbread, "I *know* what is best for me."

"Yes," said Donovan, "but *I* know what you're going to get."

They went on, Sugarbread purposely stalking behind the major, his eyes fixed with a growing madness on that felt covered flask. It was only a question now before it came to man to man—and then the major would learn something.

The desert indeed had gone mad. It was moving. The sands floated airily in the mirage, shredded out into lightly moving strips. Blue, shimmering pools mocked them with the promise of cool water—but they didn't fool Sugarbread. He had seen them before, when the tents at Rutbah rocked like sails at sea in the scorching middle day. It was desert trickery, maddening enough to make a man lose his head—it was so much *like* water. He began to think of whole mountains of cool ice, Sergeant Sugarbread sitting on top of them, squeezing oranges into his mouth. He thought of the water sellers in Bagdad clanking their brass cups . . .

He waded on into the billows of the heat. The major had taken to falling now, lagging behind. Once or twice Sugarbread had retraced his steps to help him to his feet. Donovan seemed just about done and Sugarbread pondered the problem of when it would be justifiable to walk off and leave him, when, looking back, he found the major had disappeared! Another desert trick! For a few seconds he stood there, swaying crazily, and then a freakish lifting of the heat pools showed him the crumpled figure lying on the sands. It vanished again almost at once, but Sugarbread, with a deadly intentness, lurched back to the spot. The major, his dud leg twisted under him, had evidently fainted from pain. His eyes were closed, but Sugarbread's eyes were fixed on the water bottle and this time he meant to have it. He chuckled a little as he knelt down to take it. Then he snatched it, jerked out the stopper and swept it to his burning lips—refusing to believe what its lightness had already told him. It had been drained dry.

"So," he said slowly to the prostrate figure on the ground, "so that was your game, eh? That's why you dropped behind!" He bent over and gave the major a shake. "Wake up, wake up!" Then louder and louder, "Wake up, you swine!" Suddenly he gave way to a fury of abuse, in the midst of which Donovan opened his eyes. He made an effort to sit up but Sugarbread shoved him down again.

"Listen," said the flight sergeant, "there's no use now. I *know*—and now you're going to learn something too."

And, sprawled there in the crazy heat dance, Major William Donovan was forced to hear what No. X Squadron thought of him. There was a subdued, almost maniacal exultation in the flight sergeant's hoarse croaking as he explained how back in the camp he had been forced to submit to the major's "snootiness"—what a real pleasure it was, before they both conked out, to talk man-to-man to a little whipper-snapper who had

been making life a sheer hell for him.

"I don't even mind pegging out," said the half frenzied Sugarbread, finishing with a grand gesture. "But this—" banging the empty water bottle down on the major's stomach—"I didn't think that even *you* would do a lowdown trick like that."

Then Sugarbread staggered off . . .

IT WAS about noon the next day when a Rajput of the Bikaneer Camel Corps spotted him swaying groggily across the sands. He had to chase him to catch him, Sugarbread thinking the Arabs had got him at last.

"This unfortunate man has been turned crazy by sunstroke," said the Rajput to his subaltern, when he had brought Sugarbread back on his tandem seat to the column. "He says things, sahib, about his officer."

"But doesn't he know that Major Donovan has been found?"

"No, sahib; I did not answer him because the man is mad."

This conversation was in Hindi, a language which the flight sergeant could not understand. And neither when he broke the news of Donovan's being picked up by a plane, could the lieutenant understand the words of Flight Sergeant Sugarbread.

"Good Gawd!" he gasped.

They say it is the waiting that gets a man in the death cell; it's almost a relief when he hears the hangman's footsteps at his door. And so it was with Sugarbread when the orderly came to say that Major Donovan was waiting for him over in his own private marquee. It was after sundown and the major, foot wrapped in poultices, was lying on his camp cot, beside which was a bottle of whisky and two chairs.

"Well?" said Donovan.

Sugarbread looked at the doctor who was occupying one of the chairs and licked his lips.

"Maybe I'd best be off," said the M.O.

"Yes," said Donovan, "if you don't mind."

"Well?"

The doctor had gone now and Sugarbread and his major were left alone.

"Well—what?" Sugarbread suddenly heard himself saying desperately. "You've got me. Go on."

He looked at the water bottle lying on the major's bed. But the major was talking very strangely.

"You know, Sugarbread, one lives and learns. Maybe I learned something out there, maybe you'll learn something now. Hand me that water bottle."

He could have reached for it himself, but when Sugarbread sullenly handed it to him the flight sergeant suddenly felt his thumb seized, and the next instant found the flask impaled on it like an enormous lollipop. The feel of jagged metal inside the deceitful felt covering was enough to tell the whole story. Ripped open in the crash!

"So you see—" the major smiled—"there never was any water."

That night when Sergeant Sugarbread was meditating upon life in the moonlight by the hangars, little Evan Davis came up to him.

"Indeed," queried the little Welshman, "does he know what we did to him—how we drained his petrol, hoping he'd crash and not come back?"

"No—" Sergeant Sugarbread grinned guiltily—"and what's more, he's not going to know, either."

He leaned forward, gripped the Welshman by the ears and slowly exhaled a long breath into his helpless face. The atmosphere became like a pub at closing time.

"Do you smell that, my little man? Ain't that glorious? That's half a bottle of the major's pet whisky—the other half's inside the major. And you see that his new bus is hunkydory when he's ready for it, or I'll skin you alive."

Conclusion

DEATH *in* TIGER VALLEY

By REGINALD CAMPBELL

ONE night a man eating tigress and her mate came to my teak valley in the Siamese jungle, and from that moment I knew no peace. Ralph Grainger, whose camp lay only eight miles across the river, wagered a hundred ticals that he —not I—would kill the tigress. And from that little bet it seemed that a whole year of calamity and fear had grown. Because he realized that Mary Collins, the doctor's daughter at Cha Kum, favored me rather than him, Grainger grew superior, then bitter; and finally in a blaze of contemptuous words our friendship, once so close, exploded into nothing. We were enemies.

Had I been calmer, had he been less jealous and less callous, we might have campaigned together against the man eaters that were spreading terror in our forests. But with proud stubbornness, we allowed the demoralization of the valley to get quite out of hand. The natives were forced to forsake their villages; and Grainger, though scarcely speaking to me, assisted me in helping them into Cha Kum. But there was no truce. He returned to his camp; I to mine. The tigress

and her hungry mate still roamed . . .

After an elephant and several men had been snatched by the unholy beasts, the coolies deserted. I was left alone, without even a servant in my bungalow. Eight miles away, Grainger too was alone.

Tommy Malone rode down from Cha Kum to try to smooth out the feud, but his visit was a blunder. Grainger, wild with anger, came riding into my compound on his gray mare, and accused me of sending Malone to him. I denied it. I was so full of pent-up anger myself that, forgetting Mary Collins and the tigress and everything except the diabolical Grainger, I invited him to tie his mare and step up on the veranda.

He secured the mare and returned. I took off my tunic. He did likewise.

"Ready?"

"Ready!" he answered, and dived at me.

I SIDESTEPPED that first furious rush, and my right fist crashed against his ear as he, unable to check himself in time, passed me. But he was like a coil of spring steel. He whirled and from nowhere threw a fist like a rock tied to a cord. It took me fair in the mouth and I was half blinded by the tears that welled in my eyes. I jumped away, out into the open and, an instant later, as my sight cleared, I smashed into him. He was strong—far stronger than one would have imagined; but he was no match for me. I beat him back under a two handed attack to the body and head; swinging unscientifically but with every ounce of my weight behind each blow. For a minute or so he fought back gamely. Then, as I reeled from a glancing left hand that grazed my nose sufficiently to bring a drop of blood, he leaped forward incautiously. I swayed back, set my feet, and let him have it fair. The blow took him high and he went to one knee. Before he could regain his feet I had leaped on him and, holding his arms pinioned at his sides, I lifted him clean off the floor. He was helpless—and knew it.

"And now," I panted, "you can get out!" And I heaved him over the veranda railings into the compound below.

The drop wasn't far, only twelve feet or so, and the ground was as soft as putty from the rains, but for awhile he lay motionless, and at last, fearing lest I'd done him some internal injury, I ran down the steps and bent over him.

He began to rise as I did so, and I saw that he was only winded by the fall. I made for the steps once more, then whirled as a demon came at me. The gray mare, with her reins torn in half and dangling beside her, was almost on top of me. I saw a lean, vicious face, all whites of eyes and grinning teeth, and put all my strength into a blow that nearly broke my wrist. Had I been a weakling she'd have downed and killed me in no time, but as it was my blow must have caught her on some tender part of the muzzle, for she staggered on her legs with pain and gave me just that second I wanted to regain the steps and the safety of my bungalow.

Up there, I threw Grainger's tunic after him. He picked it up, then, hurt though he must be, vaulted on the mare and galloped like a whirlwind out of the compound and across the Mae Fah.

When he had disappeared into the thick jungle that bordered the farther bank I went to the storeroom and took out the last bottle of whisky I had left. That night I drank myself into a stupor.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TIGERS STRIKE

I RESUMED my nightly watch beneath my bungalow. Eleven nights passed without incident, but on the twelfth, and just as I was giving up hope, I heard the tigers calling. They were, I judged, a full half mile away, but their moans, the long drawn out hunting moans that strike terror into the hearts of every living thing in the jungle, could plainly be heard. The sound started on a low, hoarse note, rose slowly to a blood curdling whine, then rumbled away in a deep, grating *a-a-o-o-u-u-w*.

No words of mine can describe the awfulness of that sound. It set my skin and hair bristling like a dog's. I listened, though the pulses in my ears were drumming so violently that for a time I heard nothing save the *pad-pad-pad* of my own racing blood. Then I heard them again. They were nearer now. The moment I'd waited for so long had come.

My nerve failed me in the crisis, and I found myself running frantically up the steps and into the bungalow. Following my custom, I'd put out all the lights before going on watch, and the interior of the building was in pitch darkness. I blundered against a table, and what must have been the lamp went over with a crash. This brought me to my senses. What was I doing here in the bungalow? I'd put myself in the worst possible position for dealing with the man eaters, yet where else could I go? Nothing on earth would induce me to resume that perilous, lonely position beneath the building.

In desperation I gazed round at the dim compound below. The stables! The companionship of my ponies behind strong wooden walls! Stealthily now, and moving in absolute silence, I crept down the steps and over the compound. The door of the stables opened without a creak, and I was inside, nestling up against the warm, silky bodies of my ponies.

In a moment I felt better, and cautiously approached the side of the stables that faced the bungalow. One or two knots in the woodwork were missing, and I peered through the largest of the holes thus left. It was not big enough to aim through, but it gave me a direct view of the whole of the front of the bungalow and a small part of the compound on each side of it. The visibility was fairly good, for a halfmoon lighted the cloud wracked sky, and of late my eyesight at night had improved wonderfully as a result of my frequent vigils. With my eyes glued to the aperture, I watched and listened.

My ponies kept perfectly quiet. Not a sound disturbed the sleeping night, nor had I heard the tigers since the calls that had sent me panic stricken into the bungalow. Were they coming after all? And if they did, would they come to the stables or to the bungalow? With their marvelous hearing, they would undoubtedly have caught the echoes of my blundering entrance into the living room, though whether they'd seen me cross over the compound depended on whether they'd reached the edge of the jungle before I gained the stables.

These questions were crowding to my brain, when a thrill ran through me from head to foot. A great, striped ghost had appeared in the compound a few yards to the left of my bungalow.

It was the tiger; his huge size alone proclaimed that and, frozen with fascination, I watched his movements. He slunk along the front of the building, vanished from sight behind it, then reappeared in the first position I'd seen him in, close by the foot of the steps. That meant he'd circled the whole building.

Motionless as a statue, he gazed up at the veranda above him. Four, five, six seconds passed. Yes, he would go in. Down came his head, up went his forepaws, then in rolling undulations he writhed up the steps. For an instant I saw his shape on the veranda, after which he disappeared into the jet blackness of the living room.

My eyes jerked back to the space at the foot of the steps. I sought another shape. It came. The tigress! My mouth went dry as tinder. The tiger had been frightening. *She* inspired a horror that was sickening.

She moved, heavily as I thought, into my circle of vision. No snarling rushes this time, however; she was more soundless than the night. But the hate was there, for her eyes flashed terror to left and right, and her mouth opened and shut in a voiceless snarl. Compared to her, the tiger had seemed a harmless plaything.

She paused at the foot of the steps, then following her mate. Yet, she *was* moving heavily. *Pluppetty - pluppetty - pluppetty-plup!* went her paws up the steps and

over the veranda. Silence and darkness. Both the killers were now inside my bungalow.

Inside my bungalow. My brain shied away from the thought, only to return with horror to this ghastly fact. My bookcase, the little green baize card table, the photographs on the walls, a cut glass decanter, my bedroom, the frame by the looking-glass, a slight tear in the *dhurry* on the floor, an old pair of black Chinese trousers hanging on a chair, the friendly, pleasing intimacies of my home invaded and fouled by the obscene presence of the killers. The very idea was blasphemous.

The sense of horror vanished from my mind, to be replaced by a cold desire for vengeance. I'd played the skulking coward long enough. I must get out of those stables at once. Less than a minute had probably elapsed since the tigers had entered my bungalow, but it had seemed like years. I sidled past my ponies toward the door. I could sense that the poor beasts were awake and frightened, but luckily they'd made no noise so far.

Reassuring them with a touch on their flanks, I noiselessly opened and closed the door behind me. Once outside, I edged round the stables till I was facing the bungalow. A dark shadow, cast by the stable wall, blackened the ground for several feet, and in this shadow, with my back against the wall through which I had lately been peering, I waited with my rifle at the ready. Now I could use it directly the killers appeared.

I began counting inwardly. I'd got up to fifty, when one shape evolved from the gloom in the living room. It crossed the moonlit veranda and reached the veranda railings. Raising itself on its hind legs, it rested with its forepaws on the top rail. The tiger was looking round the compound for me. I, down in the compound, was looking up at the tiger, barely forty yards away.

I'd hoped to see the tigress first; she was far the more dangerous animal of the two, and once my rifle roared further concealment was out of the question. I dare not, however, wait for her to appear; the tiger, standing upright as he was, made a magnificent target and I might not get a second opportunity at him. I aimed straight at his tawny chest and began to squeeze the trigger with an even pressure.

He saw me. Standing though I was in deep shadow, he yet had time to stiffen for the jump and consequent charge before my rifle thundered. Close on the echoes of the shot came a crackling of woodwork and a thud that shook the earth. Behind me my ponies were plunging in terror, and without turning my head I called out reassuring words to them.

I reloaded the spent barrel. The tiger was dead. I *knew* he was dead. The mere violence of his fall had told me that, but where was the tigress? I strained my eyes into the Stygian gloom within the bungalow. Nothing to be seen, nothing to be heard. Had she escaped into the jungle by the back exit of the bungalow, or was she still crouching in the building?

The pool of shadow round my feet merged with the rest of the compound, and a big raindrop splashed on my face. The scant light was failing rapidly, and I crept into the stables again, closing the door thankfully as the rain began to come down in torrents. Cold and wretched, I spent the remaining hours of darkness with my ponies.

AT EARLIEST dawn I was out in the compound. The Mae Fah was in flood, and the teak logs were booming and crashing against one another. Soon there would be a series of hopeless jams in the river, but with my elephants away nothing could be done to avoid them. Strange —the far reaching results of one animal turning man eater.

I strode up to the dead tiger. Magnificent though he was, I gave him but a glance; my mind was on the whereabouts of his mate. I circled round the bungalow, holding my rifle ready for instant use. The heavy rain had washed away all tracks, and she might be anywhere. I halted at the foot of the steps leading up

to the veranda. Dare I go in? I braced myself and walked into the bungalow.

In the living room—nothing. But to right and left of it, with swinging partitions between, were the spare room and my bedroom. The entrance to these rooms could, if necessary, be closed by sliding doors, but the latter were rarely used and in consequence every part of the bungalow was easily accessible. I strode across the living room and peered into the spare room. Nothing. And now for the bedroom!

Halfway over to it I whirled with a sob of terror in my throat. I could have sworn I'd heard a *pit-pat* on the boards behind me, yet my rifle was aimed at—nothing. With an oath I made for the bedroom again.

I pushed at the partition. It swung back at me as though propelled by some presence on the other side. I recoiled a step, then, angry with myself, plunged through the partition. The bedroom was empty—but my bed had been worried.

My gorge rose, and I left the room quickly; there was yet the rear veranda to be inspected. Here I found marks on the boards which told me that the tigress had jumped down into the compound from this point. She'd probably made off directly she heard my shot and, screened by the bungalow, successfully escaped into the jungle. Where she now lurked was a matter for conjecture; she might be only a few hundred yards away, she might be several miles; but at least she wasn't on my premises and I could breathe freely for awhile.

My next move was to have all those tainted bedclothes destroyed, for I could no more have slept in them again than I'd have slept in some one's winding sheet. Mattress, blankets, sheets, pillows and all, I rolled them up and took them outside. After soaking them in kerosene, I applied a match, and a minute later they'd gone up in a blaze. This done, I made my first close inspection of the dead tiger.

He was superb. With the tape measure I sometimes used when girdling standing teak trees, I took his length from nose to tip of tail. I made him six feet seven inches, which I imagine must have been a record for these parts. As for his weight, I judged him to be close on seven hundred pounds—three times the weight of a very heavy man. But his muscles were simply terrific and it had needed all my strength to straighten him out for measurement. Now that he was dead, he looked even more tremendous than when I'd seen him alive.

The next consideration was his magnificent skin, which, save for the neat, round hole made by my bullet in his chest, was intact and in perfect condition. By great good luck my mahouts were due to arrive in two days' time with mails and stores, and they could either skin him for me or else take him into Cha Kum for the purpose; meanwhile, however, I must get him beneath some sort of cover in order to hide him from the vultures, and I started trying to drag him under the bungalow.

Strong as I was, I failed to move his whole body an inch until I hit upon the idea of levering him along with the aid of bamboo poles. Even then it took me an hour to get him well under the building, after which I went into the kitchen and cooked myself a badly needed meal. The meal over, instead of sleeping I forced my mind on to the slaying of the tigress.

I remembered the heavy manner in which she'd gone up the bungalow steps. This led me to do a rapid bit of mental arithmetic. The tiger had, I calculated, mated with her at the end of April, for that was when I had come across him when riding on Sunstar. Add one hundred and sixteen days, and you arrived at, say, the twenty-fourth of August. The cubs would therefore be born in a little under a month from now. Here was food for thought indeed.

When a tigress has cubs she chooses a lair. In this lair the cubs remain until they are old enough to accompany their mother on hunting expeditions, but in the meanwhile she has to make nightly excursions after game in order to obtain food

for herself; in short, she is tied down over a number of weeks always to return to one particular spot, and once that spot was found I'd get both her *and the cubs*. A good three weeks, however, still had to pass before she'd choose the lair. What would she do in those weeks?

Surely, with her movements growing heavier, she would choose game that was slow and easy to kill? And did not I come under that category? Again, her mate had been slain by me, and there was such a thing as revenge. But did wild animals seek revenge? I rather doubted it, and yet the tiger had met death at my hand and *she knew it*.

My thoughts became misty. I'd had no sleep since the previous afternoon, and now my eyelids were drooping. I must sleep in the stables; I must sleep in the stables. Saying this, I fell asleep in my chair in the bungalow.

It was evening when I woke. I sprang to my feet. Over in the stables I could hear my ponies neighing, for the poor beasts had not been watered or fed all day. Seizing a pair of buckets, I hastened to the well at one side of the compound. The well had gone dry in the hot weather, but now it held six feet of clear, earth filtered water. I filled the buckets, then with one in each hand began to walk over to the stables. When halfway across the compound, however, I caught out of the corner of my eye a slight movement on the grass below the left hand wing of the bungalow. I halted immediately and turned my head.

My rifle was in the bungalow, and the tigress crouching at the foot of the steps.

CHAPTER XX

I FACE THE TIGRESS

THE GREAT ringed face was open in a snarl; the tail twitched nervously; the ears were flattened; with her belly close to the ground, she crouched there, motionless save for that twitching tail and the amber eyes that flashed unquenchable hate at me. Rigid in every muscle, I stared back into those terrible eyes.

I was done. Not one vestige of hope remained, for I was right in the center of the compound and she'd be on me long before I could reach either the stables or one of the trees in the surrounding jungle. No weapon of any kind, not even my revolver, and that death staring at me some thirty yards away. Finish!

I believe it was the very hopelessness of my position that swept the clouds of fear away. It's hope that worries a man, sets him thinking this way and that, harasses him with doubts, and I, devoid of this, was conscious of a marvelous clarity of mind. I pierced through the smoldering fire of the killer's eyes and read the workings of her brain as though it were an open book. The fact that when halfway over the compound I'd suddenly halted and faced her had undoubtedly saved me from an immediate charge, and meanwhile she was content to watch me in exactly the same manner as a cat watches a mouse. The tiger would have charged me outright, but she, with that devilish cunning of hers, preferred to wait my next move, and that move was bound to place me at even greater disadvantage.

With infinite slowness I lowered the buckets I was holding on to the ground. She stiffened for the charge, but as soon as I had resumed an upright position the tension in her body relaxed. That meant that so long as I stayed motionless so would she—at least for a period of time. Should I endeavor to escape, however, then she'd be on me like a flash.

Face to face we glared at each other through the rapidly failing light. How still the evening was; not a breath of wind stirred; no crying of birds, no chattering of monkeys, only a deathly silence. As the seconds ticked by, I felt my nerve going. Fear was returning to me with icy breath. I tried to shout, but no sound issued from my parched throat. As on the first time I had seen her, I wanted noise.

As if in answer to my wish, one of those sudden gusts of wind that lash the forest came surging along. The trees round the

compound swayed and whispered, and now that the silence was broken I found my voice. I shouted hoarsely, but the sound seemed to rouse the killer, for the glare in the amber eyes now reflected a sudden, set purpose.

Slowly she rose up from a crouching position. One paw was raised from the ground and the swaying began. Another gust of wind lashed the forest. She was charging me! I flung both arms across my face to shield my eyes.

Crash! The compound roared to the echoes of a rifle shot. Crash again! I lowered my arms. The tigress was in the act of disappearing into the jungle at the rear of the compound, and I standing alone and unharmed. I leaped for the bungalow steps and took them in two strides. My rifle! Seizing it, I rushed to the back veranda. There gloomed the dark tangle of vegetation into which she had escaped. I fired both barrels haphazard into the tangle, reloaded, fired again. Silence, save for the wind that was now blowing steadily.

I ran down into the compound. The darkness was increasing and the trees looked grim and eery. Who had fired those first two shots?

"You!" I shouted. "Where are you?"

No answer. The wind increased and down came the rain. Still clutching my precious rifle, which never again would leave my side for an instant, I rushed to the stables for safety and shelter. My ponies were in a lather of sweat. The urgent need for attending to them thus saved me from the nervous reaction that would otherwise have followed. I made them as comfortable as I could, then sat down by them in order to reason out the strange event that had come to pass. Go out into the compound to make a search for whoever had fired the shots? In the wind and the rain and the darkness? I shivered and nestled closer to Sunstar.

Ralph Grainger! He alone was in the valley, and it must be he. First, then, how had he been occupying himself during the last few weeks? Stalking the tigers on foot, I felt certain; he was much better at that sort of game than I was; he could move with almost as much stealth as the killers themselves, and it wasn't in him to stay night after night in his bungalow in the hopes that they would come to him; he had to be at action.

Had he, therefore, been out stalking today and arrived at the edge of my compound at the very moment that the tigress was charging me? No, I told myself; the coincidence was too far fetched and in addition the sound of his shots appeared to have come from high up over the compound, as though he had been perched up in one of the trees overlooking it. How, then, had he come to be there?

I formed a solution as follows; on the previous evening he'd traced the tigers, either by seeing their pug marks or by hearing them, to somewhere in the vicinity of my bungalow. Being utterly devoid of fear, he'd then stayed all night up a tree in order to remain near them. During the night he had heard my shot which had killed the tiger, and as soon as dawn came he had stealthily crept up to the rim of my compound with a view to discovering what had happened.

He would then not only have seen the body of the tiger, but my movements would have told him that the tigress had evidently visited my compound but escaped. Knowing this, what would his next move have been?

He'd reason, I mused, that the tigress might shortly return to seek vengeance for the death of her mate. What better then than for him to scale a tree overlooking the compound and await developments? A grim situation, and one likely to appeal to a man like him, since I would serve as the bait which would enable him to win that bet of five thousand ticals—for so the bet now stood, so long as the *tigress* remained alive.

Yet why, if he had been there, had he not fired directly she surprised me in the compound? And why, for that matter, had she not attacked me at the moment she came in, which must have been when I was filling the buckets at the well?

The answer to the latter question was

clear; she'd resolved to torture me first by a slow refinement of cruelty. Cruelty. That suggested Ralph Grainger in his worst moods. Might not he have resolved to do the same? Perhaps he, too, had decided to play with me till the last moment; and more than that, perhaps he had toyed with a thought, a thought that involved nothing less than—murder!

Yet he had fired in the end, only to miss with both barrels. The light had been tricky, certainly, but Grainger was known to be an excellent shot. Had he missed deliberately? That would account for his slinking off directly afterward—as I was sure he had done, killer or no killer about—but if this was true what point would there have been in his firing at all?

I gave up the last problem as insoluble. One thing, however, I did know. He had come close to murder this evening. True, the very sound of his shots had scared off the tigress in the nick of time and thus saved my life, but that had been brought about more by the tigress's evident dread of a rifle than by any deliberate action on his part. One more strange, inexplicable incident with Ralph Grainger, I mused fiercely, and the world would become too small to hold both of us.

CHAPTER XXI

I SEEK HER LAIR

TWO MORNINGS later three of my mahouts arrived on their elephants. They brought some welcome stores and mails, and by them I sent back the body of the tiger to Cha Kum for skinning. Alone once more, I settled down to my nightly vigil beneath the bungalow, but after a week had passed without incident I gave up the practise. Something told me that the tigress, scared as she had been by the unexpected shots while I had seemed defenseless, would avoid my compound at any rate until well after the cubs had been born.

Meanwhile, two or three weeks had yet to elapse before she would choose her lair, and I resolved to devote this period to making myself as fit as possible under the circumstances. When the time arrived for seeking out her and the cubs I wished to be in perfect physical condition, but of late I'd been neglecting to feed myself properly and as a result had lost both weight and strength. I therefore spent the period from the 8th to the 25th August solely in attending to my own needs and those of my ponies, who, like me, were rapidly losing condition.

I replenished my larder with fresh food in the shape of green pigeon and jungle fowl, and on one evening I shot a barking deer right inside the limits of the deserted village; I spent hours on my cooking, taking infinite pains to insure myself plenty of wholesome meals, and when not engaged thus I exercised my ponies and saw that a daily and plentiful supply of fresh jungle grass was insured them.

At night I slept in the stables, and though my fear of the tigress was soon considerably lessened, neither by day nor by night did my rifle leave my side. As for Ralph Grainger, not once did I see or hear of him the whole of this time.

By the mail my mahouts had brought out to me, there had been a letter from Mary Collins in which she begged me to come into Cha Kum for a brief holiday. I tore up the letter without answering it, for of late my feelings toward her had undergone a change. She, together with old Trevor, Malone, Dick Mannering, and all the other jungle-wallas scattered throughout the north, wished to get between me and the slaying of the killer; they also wanted me to make friends with Ralph Grainger. Ralph Grainger the would-be murderer! How then could I bring myself to visit any of them?

I'd reached that stage of loneliness and nerves that makes a man resent the very idea of meeting any of his fellow creatures. For weeks on end now I'd lived with three companions: loneliness, hatred and fear. These had so distorted and poisoned my mental outlook that I saw an enemy in every one who wished to help me, yet I sought to cure that vague sense of illness I undoubtedly felt at the time by eating bigger and better meals!

On the 26th of August I began my search for the tigress's lair, for I reckoned that by that date the cubs would have been born. The rains had by now reached their zenith, and the jungle presented one huge grim wall of sodden, fleshy vegetation. Already the rear part of my compound was swamped by jungle, while the village and the temple were almost completely overwhelmed. My task indeed seemed hopeless, yet I did not despair, for I had one great advantage; I knew instinctively the sort of cover the tigress would choose.

Riding being impossible, for thirteen days I searched on foot. Keeping always on my side of the Mae Fah River, I searched north, west and south, but not one clue as to her whereabouts rewarded me. On the afternoon of the fourteenth day, however, I picked up some footprints on a muddy piece of ground. They were Grainger's and, so far as I could judge, about twenty-four hours old.

I followed them cautiously, and though I soon lost them owing to the rain washed earth, I kept on in the direction they had indicated. Grainger, I knew, must be out on the same quest as myself, and if he unwittingly helped me so much the better for me.

At five o'clock that afternoon, when roughly a mile inland from the Mae Fah and three miles from my bungalow, I came upon a patch of jungle of the exact type I'd hoped for. A dense clump of bamboo reared out of the center of a huge, circular wall of tall elephant grass, and somewhere, either in the bamboo or in the grass, I felt sure that the tigress had made her lair.

Treading like a cat, I made a circuit of the grass, but nowhere could I discover any break in the surface, though at one point I saw some very faint pug marks on the ground. Certain now that the tigress had lain up within, I completed the circle, then rapidly considered the position.

To push in and beard the tigress in her lair would be tantamount to suicide. The grass was nearly twice the height of a man, of saber-like quality, and of such thickness that once inside it it would be impossible to see a yard ahead. To make any progress at all through the tangle a passage would have to be forced by sheer strength, and the noise thus made would give the tigress ample warning of approach. Set fire to the windward edge of the wall and wait on the other side? Impossible, for the grass and the bamboo were sopping wet from the rains and would be in no condition for burning for months to come. Send in elephants, untrained to rifle fire and ridden by terrified mahouts? They might as well remain safely in Cha Kum. What then was there left for me to do?

I must sit up in one of the trees that overlooked the circle of grass, and remain in that position until I caught the tigress either leaving or entering the clump on one of the frequent hunting journeys she must take. I could not, of course, cover every point of exit from one given tree; the clump was a huge one, being about a hundred yards in circumference, and she might go in and out at the side opposite to the one guarded by me. Luck, however, would have to help me in that, and the next matter for decision was when to begin my vigil.

I glanced round uncertainly. A *machan* was impracticable for I could not make one by myself, and the need for silence was imperative. I must therefore sit across the fork of some suitable tree, but this would entail considerable physical strain and at the moment I was tired out from tramping through the jungle since dawn. The only food I'd taken with me I'd eaten at noon, so common sense told me I had better return immediately to the bungalow.

Once there I could obtain a good night's rest and then, bringing with me a plentiful supply of food and water, I'd be ready for a good twenty-four hour watch on the clump. As for any delay involved, it did not appear serious; the tigress, even should she know she was being spied on, would have to remain in her present lair for at least another month if only for the sake of the cubs.

I also had another motive for not sitting up that night. As I stood there undecided, I felt she was in the clump close by me. With any luck she might be out hunting when I returned at dawn, with the result that she would be unaware of my presence when she got back again. This being the case, the sooner I cleared out of my present unenviable position the better. I swung on my heel and began striding swiftly in the direction of my bungalow.

THE BRAIN works quickly; I don't suppose I'd actually taken more than a minute in reaching my decision, but it now seemed as if I'd stood by the clump for hours. The light, too, was growing dimmer, and it wasn't until I'd made more than half the distance home that I discontinued swinging round every few seconds to see if I were being followed.

As I neared the bungalow a sudden question leaped to my mind. Where could Ralph Grainger be at the moment? His footprints had led me part of the way to the lair, and it therefore seemed reasonable to suppose that he had come across it before I had. Unknown to me, he had watched me once before; might not he have been watching me this very evening from the shelter of some tree beside the clump? If that were so, he might kill the tigress in the night and my return tomorrow would be in vain.

I glanced up at the sky. The light was too dim for me to go back on my tracks whether I wanted to or not, and in any case, I comforted myself, it was mere supposition on my part that he might be at the clump. One matter, however, was not supposition; both of us having located the tigress, he was bound to return there shortly, so the duel between us was nearing its climax.

I thought no more of Ralph Grainger, for as I entered my compound I saw a strange pony tethered inside it. I glanced up at the veranda of my bungalow. The glow of an oil lamp showed within, and the figure of a man moved across it. I surveyed that figure with mingled emotions; first astonishment, then annoyance, then intense anger rose up in me. Again I was being interfered with by unwanted visitors, but I could not return to the forest and reluctantly I walked up the bungalow steps. At the top young Dick Mannering met me.

"Hello, Foster," he said, rather self-consciously.

I sat down in a chair and without a word began taking off my sodden boots and puttees.

"Have—have I come at an awkward time?" he stammered at last.

"Very awkward," I replied briefly.

"Then I'm sorry."

I flung my boots into a corner.

"What have you come out here for?" I asked him.

"I'd several reasons for coming. One, that I'm being sent home and I wanted to see you first."

"Being sent home, are you? What's that to do with me?"

His pale features flushed.

"Nothing, of course. Only you were decent enough to try to—help me last time I saw you in Cha Kum."

"Stop beating about the bush. What's happened to you, and why are you here?"

"I—I've funked again. The matter reached my Bangkok manager and he reported it to head office at home. My relief's on his way out now."

"Those dysentery cases in the hot weather, you mean?"

"No. Something later. One of my tuskers ran amok, and—well—I didn't do my job as I ought to have done. Another teak-walla had to come out to round it up."

"But you don't mean to say you *blame* your manager for sending you home, do you?"

"Of course I don't."

"Then what's the matter? What can *I* do about it?"

"I—I just wanted to have a yarn with you, Foster. That was all." He paused. "You see, it's my father I'm worried about."

"Because you're losing your job?"

"Not only that. He happens to believe in me. Thinks I'm full of guts, and all that sort of thing. I know, for I've gathered as much from friends at home."

"He's proud of you, in fact?"

"Yes. That's the hellish part about it."

"Your mother alive?"

"No. She died soon after I was born."

"Got a girl at home, I suppose?"

"No. There's only father."

"Can't you put up a story about being invalided home? A breakdown in health's common enough out here, and your head office won't bleat. They'll have probably already told your father that you're leaving Siam on account of your health."

"As a matter of fact, I believe they have. But that doesn't alter matters between him and me. I've lived a lie long enough, and I'm sick of it. Doesn't it make me even more of a coward than I am if I keep on lying to him?"

"I suppose it does," I admitted. "But what you tell your father is entirely your own lookout. How on earth can I help you in any way?"

"I'd only thought—" he broke off the sentence and stared out into the compound with hopeless, unseeing eyes.

"By the way, Mannering," I said, after a pause, "you've just told me you had several reasons for coming out here. What were the others?"

"Really there was only *one* other reason?" he answered.

"Was there, indeed? I'd guessed as much. One word of it, my young friend, and you leave this bungalow tonight. As it is, you clear out first thing tomorrow morning, you understand?"

He pretended to look astonished, but I kept my eyes steadily on his.

"You understand?" I repeated.

"No," he answered. "I don't understand. The other reason was—why are you looking at me so strangely, Foster?"

It was my turn to be surprised.

"Strangely?" I echoed. "What the hell do you mean?"

He'd been standing near my chair, but now he backed several paces away from it.

"Don't," he said. "Don't look at me like that."

"I've altered my mind," I said. "You *will* tell me that other reason. I've heard most people's opinions about the affair, and now I'll hear yours. You've just come out from Cha Kum, I take it?"

"Yes. I have."

"They were all talking about it there, I suppose?"

"Foster, I swear to God I don't understand you in the least. We're talking at cross purposes. What do you mean by 'it'?"

"You know perfectly well."

"I do not."

"You're lying. And you're lying because you're afraid of me."

"I'm certainly afraid of you. Now, at least."

"Stop trying to get away from the subject. What—is—that—other—reason?"

"The tigress."

"The tigress?" I repeated.

He nodded.

"You mean to tell me," I went on, "that you didn't come here in order to air your views about myself and Grainger?"

Now his surprise appeared genuine enough.

"Of course not," he replied with emphasis.

"But you knew we'd quarreled?"

"I'd heard something to that effect. But what was that to do with me?"

I rose to my feet.

"I'm hungry," I told him. "Wait here while I get something to eat."

Half an hour later we sat down to as large a meal as I could prepare in the time. I was half famished, and at my bidding we ate in silence, though I noticed that my companion hardly touched his food. He drank the whisky I offered him, however, and when the meal was over we sat in cane chairs facing each other.

"And now," I said, handing him a cigaret, "perhaps you'll explain what you mean by mentioning the tigress?"

"It's simple enough," he answered. "At present I'm at a loose end. In disgrace, to put it bluntly. Another teak-

walla's taken over my forest temporarily, and I've nothing to do but hang around in Cha Kum till I hear what ship I'm sailing by."

"Go on," I prompted, as he paused.

"Meanwhile I might as well do something to fill in the time, mightn't I?" There was a note of challenge in his voice.

For the first time I saw the real significance of the rifle he'd brought with him.

"You mean you've come out here to have a go at the tigress?" I asked him.

"Precisely. If she gets me, it doesn't matter one way or another. If I get her, it cancels a good deal of the past. Wouldn't mind telling my father the whole truth then; he'd know I'd put up some sort of a show at least once in my miserable existence."

"Tomorrow morning," I said, "you're going back to Cha Kum."

"I'm not," he broke in desperately.

"Then I shall make you. The killing of the tigress is my business—or Grainger's—and you will only be in the way."

"The coward," he said bitterly.

I passed by the remark.

"I've got to be off at dawn," I said. "And it's important that I'm not delayed one minute. I shouldn't advise you, therefore, to give me any trouble. You'll have your pony saddled by daybreak, and you'll be on the bridle path to Cha Kum as soon as it's light enough to ride. As for breakfast, I'll give you some food you can eat on the way. Do you quite understand me?"

He nodded.

"That being settled," I concluded, "we'd better see about turning in."

"One minute, Foster. Just as a matter of interest, I want to ask you a question."

"Well."

"It's common knowledge that the tiger's been killed, and that you and Grainger are still after the tigress. Trevor says she's probably had cubs by now, and that that might help both of you in rounding her up. Well, what am I to tell him and the others when I get back to Cha Kum? Have you rounded her up?"

"That," I said, "is my affair—and Grainger's."

"You come in late this evening, carrying your rifle. You're going out again at dawn, so you've told me. It looks to me, therefore, that you've found out where she's lying up. May I tell the others that?"

"You can tell them exactly what you please. And by the way, Mannering, who is in Cha Kum at the moment?"

"Only Trevor and Dr. Collins and his daughter."

"Do they know why you've come out here?"

"No. I told 'em I was just going to say goodby to you. Nothing more."

"They seem to be pretty interested in my affairs. I suppose every teak-walla for a couple of hundred miles around Cha Kum is waiting for the news you'll bring in from here."

"And why not? Surely there's no harm in their wanting to know? That's why I've asked you what the position is."

"The position is," I said savagely, "that I'm not going to stand interference from any one. And you can tell them that, from me."

"Very well," he said, in disappointed tones.

We turned in soon after that, he sleeping in the spare room on my spare bedding, I in the living room on a cane chair covered with blankets. I suppose the added sense of security in another's presence, coupled with the fact that the tigress would not deliberately seek out danger now that she had her cubs to consider, made me sleep heavier than usual. I spent a dreamless night, and the first thing I knew was the sheen of the early morning sun striking into my eyes. I glanced at my watch. The hands stood at a quarter past six, which meant that I'd wasted over an hour of precious time.

I sprang from the chair and hastened to Mannering's room. It was empty. He'd evidently, therefore, obeyed my instructions to the letter and, dismissing him from my thoughts, I dressed in a feverish hurry. Having stuffed some sandwiches

into the pockets of my jungle tunic, and filled my water bottle, I seized my rifle and rushed down the bungalow steps.

In the compound I halted as if shot. Mannering's pony was still tethered there, yet he—and his rifle—had gone. With a nameless fear in my heart, I ran desperately to the spot where I'd entered the compound the previous evening. Would his tracks point toward the tigress's lair?

CHAPTER XXII

THE COWARD

MY OWN tracks were plainly discernible; in the rains the slippery nature of the ground renders the wearing of thick, spiked boots indispensable, and I was a heavy man. Mannering, however, weighed scarcely more than ten stone and he had, I remembered, been wearing light riding boots when he'd arrived.

Luck aided me; before I'd gone ten yards I made out the very faint imprint of a heel alongside my own deeper marks. But, whereas my tracks led back to the bungalow, the round portion of his heel indicated that he had traveled in the opposite direction. There was now no doubt whatever that he'd left the bungalow at dawn with the intention of seeking out the lair if possible.

With my eyes no longer on the ground, I began running desperately in the direction of the bamboo clump, three miles away. I say I ran, for riding was impossible owing to the thickness of the jungle and the fact that no real path existed.

As I tore along my brain functioned like a thing apart from me. Now I understand why he'd asked me those last questions. Since I obviously would not let him accompany me in the hunt, he'd resolved to go by himself. My very reticence must have told him that the lair had been discovered, with the result that he'd crept out stealthily before I awoke in the hopes of finding my tracks of the day before. Rain might have washed them away, but unfortunately no rain had fallen in the night and his task was made comparatively simple. The question now was whether I could overtake him before he reached his destination.

I'd made about half the distance when I heard the sound of some one moving ahead of me. My heart leaped, only to sink in despair a moment afterward, for the head and shoulders of Grainger had come into view over a thornbush, and he was moving toward me. He rounded the bush, and I saw that he carried a human form in his arms. I rushed forward to meet him, and without a word took the unconscious figure from him. Twenty minutes later we were entering my bungalow.

We laid Dick Mannering on the bed he had but recently quitted. He was deathly pale and moaning feebly. While Grainger forced milk and brandy between his lips, I cut away the clothing. His right arm and side had been terribly mauled, and the nearest doctor was in Cha Kum. For the first time for weeks I addressed Grainger—

"Can we carry him in?"

"He couldn't stand it."

"One of us must ride for the doctor, then. Where's your mare?"

"In my compound. Your Sunstar's our only chance."

"You ride him, then. It's twenty-two miles, and I'm too heavy."

"Right. Give you a hand in the dressing first, though. You can't manage alone."

We washed and dressed the wounds. Still the boy lay unconscious. Grainger turned to go, but I beckoned him back.

"One minute. I don't like it. Feel the heart."

He did so.

"Weak, but what do you expect? It's shock, primarily. My God, is there nothing in your medicine chest for that? What the hell's the thing there for?"

"Vinegar?"

"Can't do any harm. Where is it?"

"Cupboard in my storeroom."

"Give him more brandy while I get it."

He returned from the storeroom:

"I'd better go. Hopeless, but still—Nothing more you want at the moment?"

"No. Get along, and ride like hell."

He crossed the room. On the veranda he paused.

"You know what that means? I may have to kill Sunstar."

"I know," I said quietly, but I must have gone white to the lips as I said the words.

"Grainger. That you? Where are you going?"

I swung round to the bed. A faint flush had come to the pallid cheeks, and the eyes, which had been half closed before, were now fully opened. I bent over the youngster, but his gaze was not on me; it was fixed on Grainger standing on the veranda.

"Grainger. Come here." Again the weak voice sounded and involuntarily Grainger obeyed. He walked swiftly to the bed and stood at the opposite side to me.

"Yes, Mannering?"

"I want you to stay."

"I'm just going to fetch the doctor. You've been through a bit of a show, old chap, but I'll have him here in no time."

"I don't want to be left alone."

"You won't be. There's John Foster here."

"There was." Slowly Mannering's head was turned toward me, and for a brief instant I saw real, naked fear in his eyes. Then the expression changed to one of infinite relief. "Ah, he *is* here. He wasn't yesterday."

I thought him to be light headed, and said nothing. Grainger spoke next:

"See you tonight, Mannering. When I'm back."

"You're not to go. I want you both here—now. What difference is it going to make?"

"Let him go, old chap." I was speaking now, and my voice seemed miles away. "Sooner the doctor comes, sooner you'll be up and out again."

"I see. So you're both afraid to own the truth. Have I, the coward, got to tell you that I'm dying?"

A silence fell, heavy and oppressive. I sought for words. None came. The truth was irrefutable. How then deny it?

"You're going to stay, Grainger?" at last the silence was broken.

"Yes," said Grainger firmly. "I will."

"Funny, I don't feel any pain. Sort of numbed. Good thing, isn't it?"

"I'm sorry. Don't know what I'm thinking about," I said, and I crushed out the end of the cigaret that had somehow found its way to my lips.

"Why shouldn't you smoke? Both of you? Give me some water, please."

Grainger held the glass to his lips, and he drank. The smoke from our cigarets spiraled into the air. In the jungle behind the compound a barking deer belled hoarsely.

"Know what happened, Foster?" the weak voice went on.

I had already formed my opinion, and the details could wait. But of this I felt sure: Mannering had gone into the clump, and Grainger, who must have been there at the time, had done nothing to prevent him. And the tigress was still alive.

"I know enough, Dick," I answered. "You said you wanted to put up a show; you've put up a damned fine show. No one else could have done it."

"Think so, Grainger?"

"I don't think; I know. And I wish I'd had the guts to do it myself. I could at least have called myself a man."

"You'll see that my father hears?"

"Of course we will."

"No more polo," said Mannering.

"Oh, chuck it, Dick," Grainger crushed his cigaret savagely under one heel.

"Remember, Foster? I could have hustled you off the ball that time. Just before Grainger crossed you. It was my fault really that the accident happened."

"Sheer imagination," I answered. "You were yards away from the ball at the time."

"I wasn't, and both of you know it."

"What the hell does it matter?" said Grainger, almost fiercely. "You've proved yourself. *That's* what matters now."

"Shouldn't talk so much, Dick," I said. "Why not have a bit of a rest?"

"With so little time?" he answered.

In confirmation of his words a sudden change came over him. He seemed to shrink within himself, to grow smaller; the ashen pallor returned, and his eyes lost color and light. In my fancy a great black bat had entered the room. It was flitting round from corner to corner, waiting to swoop. The air had become colder with its presence.

The boy seemed to feel it, for a quick flare of energy returned to him, and with it stark fear shone out of his eyes.

"I'm afraid," he whispered. "The coward—after all. Put your hands on me. It's so lonely. God, how lonely it is. Where are you?"

Grainger put his right arm under the dying boy's head. He spoke quickly, tensely, at white heat.

"Dick. It won't be lonely."

"Ah," breathed Dick Mannering, "I hadn't thought—"

The tension in his form relaxed. The black bat poised, and he faced it with fearless eyes. The air grew chillier, then the bat swooped and we rose to our feet . . .

That night found us halfway along the cartroad to Cha Kum. With the stretcher beside us, we slept fitfully, and at earliest dawn we were on the road again, followed meekly by Mannering's little pony. The sun was rising as we reached the outskirts of Cha Kum, and gave promise of a perfect September day. Thin wisps of clouds hung round the rain washed hills surrounding the plain; in the plain itself acres upon acres of waving green rice stems rustled faintly in the breeze; white egrets flashed and settled; ploughmen sang at their work, and as we neared the town I heard the faint laughter of girls. We only brought death with that fair September morning.

CHAPTER XXIII

CHA KUM AGAIN

WE STOOD before the little doctor in his hospital. Our brief report had been made, to which he had listened in silence. When he spoke his voice was sharp and incisive and hard lines had gathered round his mouth:

"The burial will take place tomorrow morning. It will be arranged by me, and both of you will attend it."

"That is naturally our wish," I said.

"Meanwhile, I am busy. I shall send for you later, however, when you will give me fuller details of—everything. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," Grainger was speaking. "For my part, I must go back to the valley today. My ponies are there, and they can't be left unattended."

"The same applies to me, Doctor," I broke in. "We couldn't bring them in at the time, but I guarantee I'll have them back in Cha Kum by this evening."

"Is it your word, gentlemen, that you will come back?"

We gave him our promise, and hurriedly departed. After hiring two hardy native ponies in the marketplace, we cantered out to our respective forest bungalows. Leading our tired mounts, and now on our own ponies, which we found safe and unharmed, we did the return journey. By dark we were in Cha Kum again, having covered a distance of forty-four miles on horseback.

The following evening, six hours after the burial, we sat in Dr. Collins's study, whither we had been summoned. After a short period of waiting the doctor came in. His manner was unusually brusk; he motioned us to resume our seats, then turned to me.

"Mr. Foster, please tell me everything that transpired between you and the dead boy on the evening he arrived at your forest bungalow."

To the best of my ability I did so.

"I gather, therefore, that you never had the slightest intention of allowing

him to take part in your search for the man eater? Indeed, you tried to conceal from him the fact that you'd already discovered her lair?"

"That's so, sir."

The doctor turned to Grainger.

"Now tell me your part again."

"I was in a tree overlooking the grass that concealed the lair," he began. "I'd been there since the previous morning, twenty-four hours earlier. I was thinking of returning to my bungalow, when to my surprise I saw Mannering break into view from the jungle behind me."

"One moment. You'd been there already for twenty-four hours, you say. Had you seen or heard anything of the tigress during that time?"

"No, sir. But from what subsequently happened I think she must have left the clump just after dark had fallen and returned there at dawn. An hour or so before Mannering arrived, in fact."

"Go on."

"For a moment I watched him, wondering what had brought him out. To be precise, I was amazed to see him at all. Naturally, I'd no knowledge that he was even in the valley."

"Quite. And then?"

"I saw him hesitate, then suddenly square his shoulders and walk straight up to the fringe of the clump. It was at that moment I shouted to him."

"What words did you use?"

"I forget exactly. I simply called out urgently for him to come back."

"And he heard you?"

"Yes, for he halted at the fringe and turned round, evidently surprised to hear a human voice. I shouted again, and this time he saw me."

"You're quite sure he saw you?"

"Absolutely. He smiled at me."

"Seems strange a man should smile when he's going to almost certain death." It was I who spoke now.

The doctor abruptly motioned me to silence, then turned to Grainger again.

"Did he say anything to you?" he asked.

"No. Not a word. He just smiled—smiled in an awful, frozen sort of way. Next second he'd entered the grass." Grainger paused. "You must understand, sir, that I was a good thirty feet above the ground when I saw him go in. Nothing under twenty feet is safe from a tigress, and there weren't any suitable branches for me to rest on under thirty. Several valuable seconds were wasted, therefore, before I got down to earth. I then ran straight to the point in the clump where he'd disappeared, and went in after him."

"Without the slightest hesitation?"

"Do you think I would hesitate, Doctor?"

"I asked you a question, Mr. Grainger."

"I'll answer it. I went into that grass as if all the devils in hell were after me. But I couldn't see a yard ahead, for the passage Mannering had made had closed up after him. The grass, I should explain, was more like a forest of tall, thick spears; you couldn't trample it underfoot; you simply had to thrust it to one side and edge through it."

"Elephant grass?"

"Yes. To return to myself: I'd only made a few yards' progress when I heard a cry, followed by a low, throaty snarl, ahead and slightly to my left. I fought toward the sound and came upon the boy, lying on the ground. As I did so, I saw a flash of orange-yellow as the tigress broke back into deeper scrub. We were still in the grass, of course, and as yet hadn't reached the bamboo clump, in which the cubs must have been. I made no attempt to follow her, but picked up Mannering, who was unconscious, and carried him out."

"Why didn't you try to follow up the tigress? She might have attacked you as you took him out."

"I had to risk that. I guessed she'd gone back to her cubs as soon as I appeared, and that nothing on earth would have driven her away from them. She'd have charged me for certain, and then where would Mannering have been? In that tangle of grass, with practically no visibility whatever, my rifle was almost

useless, and I knew it. If only for the sake of the youngster, I daren't follow her right up to the lair. Had I done so I'd have been killed and he left to his fate."

"You then carried him to Mr. Foster's bungalow. Why not to your own?"

"His was the nearer, and I wanted his help."

For the first time now I had heard the full details of Grainger's part in the affair, as on our march into Cha Kum I had made no attempt to learn them from him. How much of it was true, I asked myself, and how much false? Hadn't he on one occasion made no attempt to save me from a frightful death until it had almost been too late? Hadn't he charged Mannering before with cowardice? What more likely then that he'd either let the boy go in unwarned or else actually taunted him into the rash act that had caused his death? That Grainger had eventually followed Mannering I did not doubt; he had probably relented at the last minute, only to find that he had been too late. One more black mark against Ralph Grainger, I reflected, and it would be his last.

The doctor's voice broke in on my thoughts—

"You say, Mr. Grainger, that before the boy arrived at the clump you yourself had been there for twenty-four hours?"

"Yes, roughly."

"Mr. Foster here has told me that he visited the clump on the previous evening. That would mean you were there at the time."

Grainger nodded.

"Did you see him?"

"Yes."

"Yet you gave him no indication of your presence."

"You are perfectly correct, Doctor."

"Because, I suppose—and I'm talking bluntly—you and he are not on speaking terms?"

"You can take it that way, if you like."

"I see." The doctor paused, then straightened himself in his chair with a quick, decisive gesture. "Well, gentlemen, I have heard both your versions, and I believe them. I'm satisfied that neither of you was responsible, either directly or indirectly, for this ghastly tragedy. In fact, you did all you humanly could to prevent this poor boy going, as he undoubtedly did, to what he knew must have been certain death. There are no coroners' inquests or other forms of inquiry demanded by law in this country, so I shan't need any further evidence from either of you. But before you go I wish to say a few words concerning yourselves. Richard Mannering is dead, and the past can not be recalled. There remain the present and the future. It's with these that I'm concerned now."

The doctor looked piercingly, first at Grainger, then at myself. His eyes held strange power in them, so much so that I could scarcely believe it was he who sat in the room with us. Before, to me at any rate, he had simply been the father of Mary Collins, a quiet, unassuming little man who lived solely for his work; now he was a man of infinite power. At last I glimpsed something of that hidden force which enabled him to perform those ceaseless, heroic labors of his.

"Rumors," he began, "ugly rumors have reached me from time to time concerning your valley. But so far I have ignored them. Why? Because, though in the mission, my duties are first and foremost those of a doctor. If two men chose to quarrel, that was nothing to do with me. Now, however, I can speak to you as a doctor, and I'll make it clear to you why I can. Your very faces tell me that you're both on the verge of a serious mental breakdown."

I shifted restlessly in my chair. Like the others, the doctor was coming round to the question of Grainger and myself; though, where the others had pleaded, he had chosen to employ veiled threats. I was about to speak, when Grainger interrupted me:

"The valley," said he, "belongs to Foster and myself, and we run it as and how we choose. Doctor, I tell you plainly that we're not going to stand any

interference in either the working of it or in our own relations to one another. As for what you've said just now, that is of course ridiculous. We're both perfectly well able to take care of ourselves."

I assented. For once Grainger and I were completely in agreement.

A knock sounded on the door, and a man whom I recognized as the hospital's head native orderly entered. He beckoned to the doctor, who withdrew, to return a few minutes later with the news that several urgent cases had arrived from some outlying villages.

"I must now leave you," he concluded. "If you'll wait a few moments my daughter will be in to see you. She wishes to speak to you before you go. You're returning to your valley tomorrow, I take it."

We nodded.

"Then I'll say goodby, gentlemen. I've warned you, and can do nothing more. But speaking now as an ordinary human being, and not a doctor, I can only say it's a thousand pities you should go on as you are. Less than a year ago you were, if I may so express it, two of the most outstanding men upcountry. You could play polo, in fact most games, better than any one else in the north; your forests, it was common knowledge, were models of efficiency; in short, whatever you put your hands to you did well, while as for courage, I remember a certain forest ranger telling me that he'd rather have one of you two with him in a tight corner than any one else he knew. But he wouldn't now. I repeat that. He wouldn't now. By your recent conduct you've thrown away, needlessly and ruthlessly, the great gifts God has given you. Goodby."

HE LEFT us. I did not look at Grainger, he did not look at me, and neither spoke a word. Our minds were made up; courtesy demanded that we should hear Mary Collins out, after which we would return to the valley, there to enter upon the final scenes of the duel. I think both of us felt that matters had reached a climax and that the end was close at hand.

When Mary came in she was very pale. We rose as she entered and remained on our feet throughout the interview.

"I've just seen father," she began, "and if he can't influence you it seems hopeless for me even to try. But I'll say just this—that boy died in the presence of you two. Isn't that sufficient to bring you together again? Is a human life so cheap that you'll allow it to be thrown away for nothing? And he will have died for nothing if you remain enemies."

Her reasoning was that of a woman, utterly illogical. You could not answer it, nor did I attempt to. Grainger also remained silent.

"I see—" Mary Collins drew herself up to her full height, and her normal calmness had deserted her, for her color had risen and her eyes were shining. "Nothing then will bring either of you to reason. I was a fool to have tried, and I know now why I was a fool. Because up till now I'd always dealt with men—real men who could confess to a fault when they were in the wrong." She paused, then swung open the door. "Please leave this room at once. If there's one thing I hate it's to be in the presence of persons whom you suddenly find to be without a scrap of decency—or courage."

That tiny pulse in my head had begun to throb, and my whole being was vibrant with anger. For the space of a few seconds my eyes seemed to battle with hers, then before she could reply I was striding down the corridor and out of the hospital.

Dust was falling as I reached the bungalow reserved for my use while in Cha Kum. I had a lot to do that night, and was thankful to feel I'd be undisturbed by visitors. With the exception of Malone, none of the teak-wallas had been able to come in at short notice for Dick Mannering's funeral owing to the great distances that separated their forests from the capital. Malone, however, whose forest bungalow lay only some two hours' ride

from Cha Kum, had been present, but owing to pressure of work he had ridden out again in the afternoon.

Old Trevor was, so I'd heard, in faraway Bangkok, whither he had been summoned the previous week in order to attend a government conference on teak preservation, and as a result of this the only white persons in the town at the moment were the doctor and Mary Collins. Secure in the knowledge that I'd be left to myself, I began writing letters.

By midnight the letters were finished. In two of them I'd left instructions to certain teak-wallas concerning the disposal of my ponies and other personal belongings in the event of my death. For I had come to my resolve. Directly I got back to the valley, and armed only with a revolver, I would beard the tigress in her lair.

Grainger's words to the doctor had convinced me that at such close quarters this weapon would be preferable to a rifle, and with six heavy bullets in the chambers there was a sporting chance that I might down her before she downed me. My primary duty, which was that of ridding the valley of the man eater scourge, having been accomplished, I could attend to the duty I owed to myself and to one other. I would seek out Ralph Grainger and force the truth out of him concerning the shots in my compound and the death of young Mannering. In short, I would break him, even—and I faced the prospect without flinching—if he compelled me in the end to kill him.

I slept dreamlessly for four hours, then, though the dawn was not yet heralded, rose and saddled my ponies.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE END DRAWS NEAR

A FALSE dawn was in the sky as I rode out from Cha Kum. I passed through the sleeping marketplace and reached the temple by the outer wall. The red mouthed dragons loomed fantastically in the eery light, to be swallowed up in gloom as I left the town behind me. The paddy fields when I reached them were still as death; not a vestige of breeze set the rice stems whispering; the air was thick and hot, devoid of life and movement. The squeaking of Sunstar's stirrup leathers and the snuffling of the black alone disturbed the stillness.

As I neared the fringe of jungle where the cart road to the valley began, the real dawn flushed the sky, and I turned in the saddle and faced it for a moment. The dawn was red and angry, for thick clouds were piling up on the horizon, promising storm and thunder later. The southwest monsoon was over, and the brief northeast at hand to bring a final burst of rain before the cold weather set in. I turned and entered the jungle.

As the light broadened I saw hoof prints on the road ahead of me. Though the last two days had been brilliantly fine, the road was still a quagmire of mud and the recent passage of two ponies could plainly be discerned. Early as I had left Cha Kum, Grainger had left before me. Yet I did not hurry unduly; I had made my plan of action and I would carry it out coolly and calmly in my own time. I rode steadily ahead through the hot, still atmosphere.

The sun rose over the pile of clouds in the northeast behind me. On either side of the little road the dark green of the jungle changed to a lighter green. Dewdrops sparkled. A treetop tossed, and far overhead I saw four gibbons plunging through space. They disappeared, and I let them go in silence. Normally I would have shouted and laughed at them, for I loved to watch their antics, but for me now laughter had died a long while ago.

At eight o'clock in the morning I reached the bridlepath that branched off down to the valley, and at ten I was in my forest bungalow. But I did not at once set out for the tigress's lair, for my ponies had to be attended to. I rubbed them down, then placed them loose in the stables with a plentiful supply of water and fodder by them. If I were killed,

some one would come along sooner or later in order to dispose of my belongings, and my ponies would be looked after by him.

Even should Ralph Grainger make no attempt to take them into Cha Kum—which I doubted, for the man loved anything to do with a horse—some other teak-walla would be out within a week; death news travels quickly in the jungle. I then took the letters I had written in Cha Kum from my pocket and laid them in a conspicuous position on my living room table. This done, I had one last look round the compound in which I had lived for so long, and finally, shortly after eleven, I set out on foot for the clump three miles away. My right hand held my revolver, loaded in every chamber.

The jungle was extraordinarily quiet; I have never known it so utterly still as it was that day. Not a breath of wind stirred, and the stale air beneath the canopy of trees gave little relief to the gasping lungs. On the sodden ground huge red and yellow toadstools exuded nausea; leeches flicked along over dank evergreen leaves; the sun, on the few occasions when I caught a glimpse of it, was veiled in a curious, livid haze through which it peered like a spectral moon; the light all round me resembled that in an aquarium, green and sickly. Twice I heard the ominous mutter of thunder still far away to the northeast.

At noon I reached the clump of grass. I stopped and listened intently before entering it. Not the slightest sound came from within. I glanced down at the hand which held my revolver; it was steady as a rock. I passed tongue across lips and entered the clump.

The tall spears of grass became harsh and relentless enemies. Their vast height obscured my vision; their sharp, saber-like edges cut face and hands; their sinuous strength flung them back at me after I had pushed them aside; but I fought on, aiming at where I judged the center of the bamboo clump to be.

Seconds, minutes passed, yet still I was in that fearful grass. I halted. In the jungle the air had been oppressive; here it was fetid. My eyes and mouth were filled with pollen and flying down; sweat bathed my limbs, lathered my clothes, chilled my body in spite of the enervating heat; but I must go on.

More grass and yet more grass, then suddenly the dark green stems of the bamboo thicket reared up in front of me. Halting a second time, I peered into the thicket, which I now saw consisted of several bamboo clumps all growing close together. And then I smelled tiger; the rank, musty odor was unmistakable.

I took one step forward. A twig crackled under my foot. The revolver, glued to my right hand, swept upward. It pointed at nothing, yet I could have sworn I'd detected a shape of tawny gold crouching in the gloom ahead of me.

What was that? In a flash I had whirled and was facing the wall of elephant grass through which I had just passed and which surrounded the bamboo. The forest of spears, tipped with woolly tufts, towered in grim silence. If they held a secret, I was not to share it.

I faced the bamboo again. If the tigress would not come out of her lair, I would go in to her. Nerving myself for the supreme and final step, I plunged beneath the curving stems of the thicket.

THE STENCH increased; it choked my nostrils. I rounded one clump of bamboo stems, to find another one confronting me. The light was dim, for the bamboos arched and met overhead, while their thin green fronds formed a canopy between earth and sky. Deeper and deeper I went into the thicket. I came to where a patch of short grass had been rounded and beaten down in a circle, and I knew I was gazing down upon the lair. The lair was empty.

The shock numbed me. I stood, incapable of thought or action, while the whole world seemed to crumble to pieces beneath me. I had lived a hundred lives, I had died a thousand deaths on that passage through the spear grass. All

those lives and all those deaths had been for—nothing. I felt as a soldier who, having keyed himself up to rushing an enemy trench single handed, finds that trench deserted. He stands on the parapet, gazing down upon a scene that cannot be real.

Suddenly, my brain cleared, and I began to inspect the lair closely. The ground, I now saw, bore recent traces of both the tigress and her cubs. Why then had they left the lair? The answer was supplied to me by the unexpected sight of human footprints on some damp earth nearby. And the footprints, I knew at once, must be those of Ralph Grainger.

The truth revealed itself: Grainger had come out on the same mission as I. He had reached the clump an hour or so before me, and plunged into it at a point nearest his bungalow. He had found the tigress away hunting and the cubs alone and defenseless. He had made sure of the cubs by seizing them and carrying them off to his bungalow either dead or alive. Remained the part that I had still to play.

The tigress sometimes hunted by night, sometimes by day; she followed, so my previous experience told me, no hard and fast rules by which one could trace her movements. She might have hunted all the previous night, for instance, with no success, and eventually made her kill some time today at a point perhaps several miles distant from the lair. She would then have to feed to repletion before returning home because of her cubs, who would either still be in the suckling stage or else living on partly digested food disgorged for them by the mother.

Sooner or later, therefore, the tigress would be back in the clump for the purpose of feeding her cubs, and I must remain there till she returned if I wished to kill her.

The whole place breathed of horror. It was eery, silent, macabre. I had steeled myself to face a frightful death, only to experience an anticrisis. That anticrisis was now being followed by what promised to be a long drawn out ordeal even worse than the first, and my nerves were beginning to fail me. Waves of alternate heat and cold were running through my body and the hand that held the revolver shook.

A thought struck me like a blow. At this very moment the tigress might be lurking nearby, waiting for dark to fall, when I would be helpless. My breath caught in a gasping sob, then a faint whisper went through the fronds of bamboo over my head. The whisper set my nerves screaming, and I found myself fighting desperately back through the elephant grass the way I had come.

I burst out of the grass. The jungle confronted me. Three miles away were my bungalow, my rifle and comparative safety. I began running toward that bungalow. A creeper caught me by the foot and I fell sprawling, burying my fingers deep in the soft, loamy earth. Snatching at my revolver, I was up again in a second, running, running, running. Specks danced before my eyes, a million hammers pounded in my head, but still I ran. Finally, my bungalow rose up and, half fainting, I collapsed on a chair on the front veranda.

The fit passed. I staggered to my feet and helped myself to half a tumbler of neat whisky. Life became life once more, and I sat down to consider what my next course of action would be.

One fact stood out above all others. Now that the cubs had been taken from the lair, the tigress would return once, and once only, to the clump. Thereafter she would be a free agent, no longer tied down to one particular patch of jungle. That meant, in so far as tracking her was concerned, that the whole business would have to be started all over again.

Who, then, was responsible for this happening? Ralph Grainger! Out of sheer bravado he had taken away the cubs when he should have left them alive and unharmed in the lair. Had he adopted the latter course one of us would sooner or later have bagged the tigress, whereupon the cubs, themselves potential man eaters, could have been

dealt with easily. And yet—for a brief space Grainger went out of my thoughts—there were still five hours of daylight left in which the tigress might be bagged. Should I, therefore, return at once to the clump and, armed with my rifle, wait up a tree on the off chance of getting in a shot at her during this brief period?

I decided against it. Not only might she enter the clump at a point not covered by my rifle, but she might not return till after dark, and the night promised to be pitch black and stormy. I had also another reason, which I did not care to confess, even to myself: I *dare not* return to the clump that day.

My thoughts returned savagely to Grainger, and I began to run over in my mind the happenings of the past few months; they helped me to escape from the tiny, nagging reminder of my own stark cowardice. Who had placed Mary Collins in the perilous position from which I had rescued her during the last Christmas meeting in Cha Kum? Who had callously smashed me in the polo match? Who had thoughtlessly sent his pony boy on a solitary errand that had turned the tigress man eater? Who must have scornfully watched my ghastly ordeal in the compound? Who, and this the worst of all, who had allowed a young boy to go to certain death without raising a finger to stop him? And lastly, who had given the tigress a fresh lease of life by robbing her of the cubs? To my mind, warped by prejudice, tortured by loneliness and danger till it had reached the thin border line between madness and sanity, there was only one answer to all these questions—Ralph Grainger.

I rose to my feet. The time was 2:15 and I had four hours in which to act before dark. I would ride the eight miles up to the man's bungalow and put an end to the whole, damnable situation. I would kill Ralph Grainger, or he would kill me.

I seized my rifle. I would not stoop to use it unless forced to, but he might snatch at his and I had to be prepared. Armed also with my revolver, now in its holster, I strode down to the compound. On my way to the stables I saw with a start of surprise that the river Mae Fah was in full flood. I had been conscious during the last half hour of a vague thrumming sound in my ears, but so intent had I been on my thoughts that I had not paused to investigate the cause.

I stared grimly at the broad band of yellow water, and a fierce joy arose in my heart. I wanted action, something on which my strength could bite, and the crossing of the river with Sunstar would give me that. With the possible exception of Grainger and his mare, I alone of all the men upcountry could do this feat and come through alive. The thought gave me a strange, vicious pleasure.

The cause of the sudden rise in the Mae Fah was easy to see. For hours past rain had been falling heavily in the sources of the river, and the sky in the northeast was now a dense mass of inky black. Fork lightning ribboned, and the muttering thunder sounded closer; the storm, though hanging over and round the higher hills, would be over our portion of the valley long before dark. Let it come, I told myself; it suited my present mood.

I returned to the bungalow, wrapped up some spare cartridges in an oilskin pouch, then made for the stables and put Sunstar's saddle across him. Normally he would have whinnied softly at my approach, but now he behaved strangely; his whole body was trembling and he seemed to shrink away from the touch of my hands. But he could not be afraid of me; he feared the coming storm.

I rode him down to the river bank. Within twenty paces of it, however, the pounding of hoofs sounded behind me, and, furious at the unexpected interruption, I wrenched Sunstar round to look at the newcomer. A pony was flashing over the compound toward me. It came to a standstill alongside Sunstar. The rider dismounted and seized my pony's bridle. The pale, anxious face of Mary Collins looked up at me.

CHAPTER XXV

I RIDE OUT TO KILL

"JOHN—" her eyes were fixed on mine; they held doubt, fear, passionate entreaty. "Don't go. You're *not* to go. You—hear me?"

I stared down at her without replying. She jerked at Sunstar's reins.

"Come back into your bungalow. We can talk there. I'll explain. Only get down from your pony."

I made no movement to obey her, but pointed to the bungalow.

"Please go in there and stay there till I return," I said.

"I'm going to stay here until you tell me why you're riding out like this."

I must gain time—I must gain time—I must gain time; the words repeated themselves in my brain. I must gain time in order to think of some way in which to satisfy her as to the cause of my leaving. I resolved to question her.

"Perhaps you'll tell me first why you yourself are here. Isn't that reasonable under the circumstances?" Though a cold, icy anger was in my heart, I forced myself to speak calmly. On no account must I show my hand to her.

"I'll explain everything, if only you'll come into your bungalow to listen."

I shook my head.

"You're going to tell me here," I said steadily.

She put her free hand on to the pommel of Sunstar's saddle.

"I didn't mean what I said last night to you. That's why I've come. To tell you I'm sorry. I felt—I dreaded that you might do something rash directly you got back. Can't you see I just *had* to come? Dick Mannering met his death through believing himself to be a coward. Was I to send another man to his death through the same cause?"

Now I understood; she imagined I was riding out on the mission I had, in fact, already performed. A wave of relief swept over me, to be followed by a sudden fear.

"Does your father know you've come out here alone?"

"He does by now."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked sharply.

"Listen," she begged. "I've told you I was worried. I worried all night, and in the morning hurried round, first to your Cha Kum bungalow, and then to Ralph's. Both of you had already left hours ago. What was I to do then? Father was the only white man in the town, and he is desperately busy. Three important operations that morning, and several other urgent cases as well. He'd left strict orders for him not to be disturbed till evening, so I wrote him a note which he'd see when he came out of the operating room. I then rode out on my pony."

"But how did you find the way here?"

"You yourself had often described it to me, though I took one wrong turning off the road. Otherwise I'd have been here earlier."

"You say you left a note. He'd see it about tiffin time, I take it."

"Yes. Probably before."

"In that case he'll be out here before dark."

She hesitated before replying.

"No," she said at last. "From what I know of him he won't be out till tomorrow at the earliest."

"You mean to tell me that he'll allow his own daughter to remain out in the jungle for a whole night without trying to bring her back? What did you say to him in the note?"

"John, that's my concern. But you don't understand him. If I'm in danger, it's through my own choosing, and he knows it. He also knows that I'm accustomed to take care of myself. It wouldn't be him to suddenly desert those helpless people who utterly trust him. Can't you see that his work's his life? It's sacred. His patients come first in his thoughts, his acts, every minute of his waking hours."

I believed her, for inwardly the quiet little doctor was a man of iron; I had seen

a glimpse of this at my recent interview with him. I put one more question to the girl:

"You could have seen him before you left. You could have told him you were going instead of leaving a note. Why didn't you?"

"I've explained that. He was in the operating room."

"I don't believe that was the only reason. You had another. You were afraid he'd forbid you to go if he had time to speak to you first."

"Can you blame me?"

I did not reply, for a doubt had crossed my mind. She had answered all my questions fully, and as yet had made no attempt to return to her original question to me. Why had she not done so? Obviously because she also was trying to gain time; she was trying to hold me in conversation until she could think of some way to prevent me from leaving the compound.

I had the facts; no one else would be out in the valley until tomorrow morning. That was what I wanted to know, and now I would go; time enough had been wasted and the afternoon was drawing in. What I would say to her when I returned to the compound I did not pause to consider. The situation between Grainger and myself must be ended before sunset; I had said it would be ended and it should. No one, nothing, could stop the inevitable. As for what might happen afterwards—my brain stopped short of it. I kicked my heels into Sunstar's flanks and he plunged forward.

By unbelievable strength, clinging to the bridle, she bore him to a standstill.

"You shall not go," she said, panting.

Again I forced myself to be calm.

"I've a duty to perform," I said coldly. "A duty to—the valley. Are you going to keep me from it?"

"What is that duty?"

I tapped my rifle.

"Surely you can guess?"

"You're going to cross that river? Look at it!"

"Yes," I answered. "I am."

"I'm coming with you."

That little pulse had begun to hammer in my head. Yet I must keep calm. I laughed.

"On that pony of yours? Or my black? You'd never get them down the bank. Only Sunstar and I could get across that river now—and live to reach the other side."

I think she felt that her ride had been in vain, for she nerved herself as if to make one last, desperate throw. Before she had pleaded; now her mien was imperious, commanding, fraught with deadly purpose.

"John Foster, look at me. Do you think I don't know? Do you think I rode out here only because of what I said to you last night? You've only heard half the truth, and you'll hear the rest—now."

A strange fascination held me back. I hung on her next words.

"Last night," she repeated, "your eyes betrayed you. I read something in them. Hoped and prayed I was wrong, but I *wasn't* wrong. I've only to look at you now to see that. John Foster—" her voice rang—"I call your bluff. You're riding out to murder Ralph Grainger!"

Anger smote me. I leaned forward in the saddle and my fingers closed round the wrist of the hand that held Sunstar's bridle. The touch of her wrist aroused other emotions in me; she was woman, big, golden, desirable; I longed to take her in my arms and crush her fiercely to me, but I brushed the temptation aside. The grip on Sunstar's reins relaxed, and I lashed at his flanks. I heard her scream as he swept by her, and a moment later he had reached the top of the bank, I put him to it, and we went down it in a slither of loose earth and rubble. The cool embrace of the water enfolded us.

To free Sunstar of my weight, I slid off the saddle and, with one hand grasping my rifle and the other a stirrup leather, fought side by side with him across the torrent. The current was terrific; it swept us downstream, spun us

round and round, played with us as though we were tiny corks, yet inch by inch the opposite river bank loomed nearer.

No teak logs were riding down the surface of the Mae Fah; these had long ago piled up into huge stacks at various points in the river, and without elephants I had been powerless to break them up. This aided us now to a certain extent, though we ran the danger of being swept under one of the stacks that had formed to the south of the bungalow. Luck was with us, however, for at least we emerged, dripping, on to the farther bank and felt the comforting muddy ground beneath our feet.

We had scarcely reached safety when, with a whirring roar, the river rose a full two feet higher and a mass of jumbled logs came crashing and booming down. Owing to the tremendous pressure of water, a stack of teak away up to the north had dissolved and the Mae Fah, no longer pent up, was released in its full fury.

Had I delayed my departure from the compound by but another two minutes nothing on earth could have got me across. I laughed grimly and sprang on to Sunstar's back. I began riding up the sodden path towards Grainger's bungalow eight miles distant. I felt remarkably calm and did not urge Sunstar to increase his pace until he had caught his breath. He knew the path as well as I did.

All day the storm had been hovering round the sources of the Mae Fah, but now, though keeping its rotary course, it had begun to travel slowly in the same direction as the river. The thunder was louder, the lightning more vivid, the air electric; though afternoon had not yet waned to evening, the light was already dim. On my right the jungle crouched like a beast of prey.

Shortly after four o'clock I rode into Grainger's compound. Over the veranda railings I saw the outlines of his head and shoulders. The moment for which I had longed had come. I dismounted and strode up into his bungalow.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE KILLING

"PUT THAT down," I ordered, for his rifle was in his hand.

He looked at me narrowly, then leaned the rifle against the wall behind him.

"What have you come here for? To grovel on your hands and knees as you did once before to me?" he asked sharply.

"Did I do that?" I put the question merely to lead him on.

"To all intents and purposes, yes."

"Aren't you sick of all this?" I said suddenly. Involuntarily the words came out in place of those I had meant to say.

"Sick of it all?" he echoed fiercely. "You've come here to end things, then?"

I nodded.

"And I," he went on, "was riding up to you tomorrow. For the same purpose. You get me? But now you're here—" he broke off and glanced out at the flooded river below his compound. He muttered some words that I could not catch, then swung round to me again. "You," he said passionately, "you. Always in my way in—everything. Take the killer. Twice I'd have had her right at the start if it hadn't been for you. The same again the day before Mannering was killed. I'd have had her then. She didn't know I was waiting, watching for her. Then you come blundering in and put her on her guard. But all that's nothing. It's nothing to what you do afterwards. You send a young boy out to the death you hadn't dared to face yourself." He paused, but I made no effort to speak. I was past caring for his lies. I would hear him out, then kill him.

"Think I believed those lies of yours to the doctor?" Grainger's eyes held a strange, hard glitter. "Mannering stays the night in your bungalow. How does he know where the lair is if you haven't told him? Then, in the morning, you let him go and follow him up behind like the craven you are. And that's not all Though you yourself caused his death.

you attempt to influence the doctor into believing that I was responsible. No, I haven't forgotten that remark of yours when I was speaking to him. I haven't forgotten. You and I are finishing things this very evening. You understand?"

"Yes," I said, and made for him.

Too late, I realized my mistake. I should have seized my rifle, which I had placed across a table when he had put down his, but my anger blinded me and I wanted to get my bare hands round his throat. I found myself staring at the blue barrel of the weapon he had snatched up again.

"Keep back," he warned. "You're not going to manhandle me this time!"

"Yellow," I sneered.

"No, merely practical. I can shoot. You can just tear. If you'll give me your word you'll keep your hands off me, I'll lower this rifle. We can then think of some way that'll give equal chances to both of us."

I had no choice but to agree. He replaced his weapon in its former position, and a short silence fell between us. For my part, all anger had suddenly left me. We were down to bed rock facts; one of us was going to kill the other; further words concerning the reasons for so doing were therefore totally unnecessary.

Grainger must have felt as I did, for when he spoke his voice was perfectly calm and normal.

"There's an old way of settling differences," he said slowly. "I suppose you know what I mean?"

"A duel?"

"Exactly. Melodramatic, rather, but it fits our purpose."

"That means the use of weapons."

"It does."

"What weapons?"

"Our rifles, of course."

"I don't agree to that."

"Because I'm the better shot?"

"Naturally."

"That can be got over. I suggest this." He outlined a brief plan, to which I listened intently. Then, "If you can think of anything better, say so, and get a move on," he concluded.

The plan involved the use of our rifles at almost point-blank range, and as such it held two grim advantages. Superior marksmanship would count for nothing, and there'd be little chance of either of us being merely wounded.

"I'll accept," I told him. "But there's still the signal to be arranged. How's that to be got over? Neither of us can give it."

A whirring sound, like the warning note a clock utters before striking, echoed through the room. A brief silence, then, loud and clear, one of the foot-long tokay lizards that inhabitant every bungalow made his clarion call. *T-o-o-w-k-a-w*— Four times the call was repeated, and Grainger looked at me significantly.

"Anything better than that?"

"No," I said.

"The first bell of the first tokay lizard that calls after we've taken up stations, then."

"The warning note not to be counted?"

"No. The first bell. You understand that quite clearly?"

I nodded. Though still early evening, the room was growing darker. Lightning flickered intermittently, and the sullen roll of thunder had drawn nearer. The heavy, infrequent raindrops that ride in front of a storm were already pattering on the roof.

"Your ammunition dry?" Grainger's voice cut like a knife through the stifling atmosphere. "Better make sure after crossing the river."

"I've made sure."

"Rifle O. K. as well?"

"O. K."

"That's all, then. We can take up stations."

"One minute—" I held up a restraining hand.

It was strange how utterly cool I felt now. I was reasoning calmly and collectedly; if Grainger were killed, the secret concerning the shooting episode in my compound would remain with him forever. In a crisis a man's brain often fastens on to some comparatively insignificant happening to which it lends exaggerated im-

portance, and so with me now. In reality, the truth mattered little one way or another, but I just had to learn it before he or I died.

"That evening," I said to him, "in my compound when the tigress came. You watched it all. I know you did, so you might as well tell me the truth. If you'd wanted me to be killed, why did you fire at all?"

"I've been waiting for that question." A cruel smile curved his thin lips. The mere recollection of the incident seemed to give him fierce pleasure. "And I'll answer it. You've never been manhandled, have you? Caught up by something against which you're absolutely powerless? I have—by you—and I haven't forgotten it!"

"I didn't mean you to," I said lightly.

He ignored the interruption.

"The killer came that evening, as I'd hoped she would. I was going to have shot her directly she appeared, but then I changed my mind. I saw through her, saw that she was going to play with you before she ended things. That meant I could hold my fire until the last, and watch. It amused me to watch. At last you were up against something that was stronger, physically stronger at least, than yourself. It was time."

"Go on," I said coldly.

"From my tree I could see everything. And I waited, watching for the change in the killer that would tell me to fire. I saw that change. She was just to the left of the bungalow, in full view, and normally I couldn't have missed her.

"Why did you miss her?" I broke in.

"You fool," he said. "Forgotten the wind? The evening had been still, hadn't it? Then that wind came along. It blew branches and leaves right across my line of sight just as I was squeezing the trigger. I had to fire half blind and well to the right for fear of hitting you. And I had to fire at once. A few seconds' delay and the whole thing would have been over—for you."

"And then, when you saw that your shots here merely startled her away, you slunk off without attempting to speak to me?"

"I left, if that's what you mean. What point was there in my staying?"

"None whatever," I conceded. "And I take it, if that incident had happened rather more recently, you'd have held your fire until after the tigress had charged?"

"You can take it as you like," he snapped. He was getting jumpy, I could see, for his hands were twitching and occasional nervous spasms played round the corners of his mouth. "No, I'll say it. What the hell does it matter now? I *would* have held fire. And I wish I had then. Come on. Damn this light. Let's get to our stations."

Yes, he was nervous; he wanted the business over and done with, but I felt as steady as a rock. Another question had occurred to me, and I'd put it to him. The delay thus caused would rattle him still more and increase the superiority I already held over him.

"What have you done with the cubs?" I flashed.

He started, as I'd guessed he would. He knew nothing, of course, of my journey to the lair, and imagined in all probability that I'd come straight from Cha Kum to his bungalow.

"What do you know about them?" he asked quickly.

"Where are the cubs?" I repeated.

"Since you know, they're under the bungalow."

"Dead, or alive?"

"Dead."

"What the hell made you take them from the clump? Can't you see you've ruined any chances of getting the tigress now?"

He looked at me suspiciously.

"You trying to gain time by asking all these questions?"

"Answer me that, and I've finished."

"Ruined the chances? You fool! I've increased them. I'd sat up over that clump for twenty-four hours without result; why should I go *on* sitting up there without result until the tigress abandoned

the lair? She'd been put wise, thanks to you. Nothing easier than for her to slink in and out at a point where I couldn't see her. What else was there for me to do, then? Why, go right in and have at her, like young Mannering. So I went this morning."

"And you found her away hunting, killed the cubs, and brought them here. Why didn't you wait in the clump until she returned?"

"She mightn't come back till after dark. Besides, you must have been there yourself. Did you wait?"

"No."

"Then you'll know the reason why I didn't."

"You haven't yet explained how you've increased the chances of bagging the tigress by taking the cubs."

"Can't you see? She'll find the cubs missing—perhaps has found them missing and she'll want *revenge*. She'll follow me up, and I'll get her on my own ground, where I want her. Right here."

One point in Grainger's favor, for I knew he was speaking the truth. There was no backing out, however; the other scores were too deep. Yet why had he acted as though neither of us were in danger from the killer right now—and in this bungalow?

He must have read my thoughts.

"The river," he said. "That's why I could deal with you when you came. Before even you arrived she'd have found it impossible to get across. She may have tried, of course, in which case she's drowned by now. But she may be waiting, waiting till the river falls, and I'll get her then."

"Or I will," I said significantly.

I could have added more, but held my tongue. I could have taunted him with the desire to prolong the duel even after death by keeping me in ignorance of the killer's movements, but a moment's reflection convinced me that he had another reason for his silence: he dare not confess to himself that I might be the survivor. He would kill me, then deal with the tigress later; the alternative he had resolutely banished from his mind.

"Ready?" Grainger's voice, high pitched and unnatural, seemed to pierce my eardrums. I nodded, and we took up our positions as arranged. We stood, facing one another, at opposite ends of the veranda. Our arms were folded, and our rifles lay on the boards at our feet. When the signal came, each man would snatch at his weapon and blaze at his opponent. Speed, I had told myself a dozen times since Grainger had outlined the plan, speed alone would count; I had resolved to fire long before my rifle had time to reach my shoulder.

LIGHTNING flickered over the veranda, and the roll of thunder was now almost continuous. The thrumming of the Mae Fah had deepened to a full throated roar and, as Grainger had said, nothing living could have crossed it for some time past. We were safe from interference from man or tigress.

I said to Grainger—

"The next signal?"

"Yes. Warning note not to count, mind you. The first bell afterward."

"I've got you. Neither to speak again from now on. Agreed?"

"Agreed. No—" he corrected himself with terrible urgency. "I'd forgotten. Our ponies. The survivor to look after them all."

"That goes without saying. Silence."

We awaited the signal. I peered into the increasing darkness inside the living room. On the back wall I could faintly see the long, dark shapes of two tokay lizards. Any time from five seconds to five minutes might elapse before one of them uttered its strange, periodical call. I watched those lizards with a fierce intensity, for the warning note would give me ample time to bring my eyes back to the rifle at my feet.

The seconds dragged by like eternity. In spite of my absolute concentration, I became aware that something was nagging at my brain. Everyone of us knows what it is to experience a lurking feeling

of uneasiness due to the fact that one has forgotten something; the brain tells you that you have forgotten, but it goes no further; in short, it doesn't tell you what that something *is*.

The same with me now, as I stood on that veranda with the lightning sheening round me and death crouching behind the call of an innocent living creature.

Some words Grainger had used recently. And what other thoughts had those words conjured up in the subconscious mind? Vagueness, nothing but vagueness, black, intangible, but concealing *something*.

Whirrrr, the warning note sounded through the room. My brain split in two: one half stiffened my body for instant and terrible action; the other still probed into those vague promptings of the mind. Silence: the brief, tense silence before the first bell of the tokay that would shatter the gloom with noise and spitting fire.

"The tigress will want revenge," I remembered.

I flung both arms high up over my head. Even as I did so the bell rang clear and Grainger snatched for his weapon with the swiftness of a striking cobra.

Both hands on his rifle, he froze in a crouching position. His eyes were fixed on mine; he saw me, a useless rifle at my feet, standing upright in an attitude of complete and utter surrender. For a few brief seconds he fought with temptation, then very slowly he rose and faced me on my level. I had gambled—and won. He could not bring himself to kill me in cold blood.

Fierce emotions swept across his drawn features: I read anger, disappointment, amazement and, finally, intense scorn written on them. He thought I'd played the unspeakable coward, but I did not care one jot. I had remembered! I said—

"Mary Collins is in my bungalow—now."

He stared at me. I repeated the sentence, giving each word fearful urgency. He echoed them back. Still he could not understand their significance. He resembled a man newly come out of a trance, to whom the world is strange yet familiar. I walked right up to him:

"The tigress!" I shouted. "She'll want revenge, you said. Man, she may go to my bungalow. She may be there now!"

He drew a hand across his forehead.

"Repeat what you first said to me," he told me.

I did so.

"And Mary came there to save you," I concluded.

"God!" he whispered. "Why didn't you tell me this before?"

I could not answer him, for I was now dimly aware of the madness that must have taken me. My mind had been fixed on one deadly purpose—the killing of Ralph Grainger. For me nothing else had existed until this moment.

Grainger pointed to the river.

"We can't cross that, yet. Steady now. We must think. Would the tigress go to your bungalow? I can't see why she should."

"There'll be two sets of tracks," I cried, "for I went to the clump myself this morning, then went back to my bungalow before coming on here."

He drew in his breath sharply.

"You mean she may follow your tracks? Not necessarily, though. Not if she doesn't return to the clump till about now. There won't be any tracks to follow. This rain'll have washed them away. And the scent as well. Think, man, what would she do then? No scent, no tracks, but the cubs gone. Put yourself in her position."

My last hope had gone.

"In that case she'd go to my bungalow," I cried. "She's never been to yours before, but she has to mine. Some human has taken her cubs; that she can tell directly she reaches the lair. What then? Good Lord, she goes to the place she already knows, the place where her mate was killed, the place where she knows I live. And she'll go there whether she returns to the clump before or after the rain began. We've got to get across that river—"

Grainger had reached the top of the

steps leading down to his compound almost before I had finished the sentence.

"Ride!"

I caught the word flung over his shoulder, and, seizing my rifle, I rushed after him into the shouting gloom.

The full force of the storm broke overhead as I vaulted into Sunstar's saddle. A terrific flash of lightning whitened the compound, and in the glare I saw Grainger's mare, gray, vicious, ghost-like, emerge from the stables. He sprang on her bareback and was by me in a flurry of hoofs; I wrenched Sunstar round in her wake and a few seconds later we were galloping madly down the path toward my bungalow eight long miles away.

We had roughly an hour and a half before night would fall, but the towering jungle immediately on our left and the blackness of the sky rendered it difficult for us to see more than a few yards ahead. I fixed my eyes desperately on the gray hindquarters of the mare in front of me, and prayed that Grainger's marvelous horsemanship would bring us through.

Branches lashed me in the face, my helmet was torn from my head by an overhanging branch, thorns ripped my knees, cascades of rain half blinded me, but never for an instant did I allow Sunstar to check in his stride; while Grainger held on at that pace, so should I.

The storm was slowly traveling in the same direction as ourselves, which meant that it must have ceased raining over the sources of the Mae Fah for some time past; there was a slender chance, therefore, that when we arrived opposite my bungalow we might find that the river showed signs of falling; in the tropics streams rise with tremendous rapidity, only to sink again almost as quickly, yet so great was the present volume of water rushing past on our right that I had little hope of being able to cross for hours to come. Yet I must have some hope to bear me on, and I tried to imagine that Mary Collins was no longer in the bungalow.

Seeing that she could not follow me, might she not have started back for Cha Kum directly I had left? For Cha Kum twenty-two miles distant, with a storm brewing and the afternoon on the wane? With her duty—or so she might tell herself—to stay on and face me when I returned in order to save me from myself? I abandoned the thought of her leaving as hopeless. She was there in my bungalow now. I was sure she was there, waiting, waiting, waiting . . .

Grainger was down! Up, Sunstar! No time to pull you in. Thank heaven, we cleared them. The mare was sprawling on her back, lashing furiously with her hoofs. Grainger reeled out from the scrub into which he'd been thrown.

"Ride on, man!" He meant I was not to wait for him,

"Come *on*, Sunstar!"

I was leading now. The blind path reeled and twisted in the eery half-light. A fallen tree trunk showed up suddenly ahead right across the path. The storm must have blown down the tree, for it had not been there on my ride up-river and I had no warning. At it, Sunstar! I felt him gather himself for the jump. We soared through rain swept air. Twigs ripped my face. Blood spurted, ran warm down one cheek. We were over, and the path ran ahead again. Warn Grainger? No. Get *on*.

WE ROUNDED a sharp corner. A deep depression in the ground, covered with a black welter of slime and mud, rose up to hit me as Sunstar tried to take it in his stride and failed. He rolled over sidewise and I was engulfed in a sea of clinging thickness. I fought to my feet, dashed the mud from eyes and mouth, saw Sunstar gamely struggling to rise from the reeking slough. I pulled him out, to find that the saddle had slipped round to beneath his belly. By sheer strength I ripped the girth straps clean away from their stitches.

It would be quicker to discard the saddle than to strap it into position again. I leaped on to Sunstar's back, and even as I did so Grainger on the mare foamed up past me. He took the jump. I heard the suck of the mare's hind legs as she almost

failed, then she was gone, gone in the sizzling, rain swept darkness ahead. Sunstar plunged after her.

I soon caught her up, for the real dark, the night dark, was nearly upon us and not even Grainger could gallop through that. A few more hundred yards and I sensed rather than saw that we had at last reached the familiar ground opposite my bungalow. Dismounting, we peered through the tangled reeds at the water's edge.

At first we could make out only a dim grayness, then a sheet of lightning flamed; the lightning was repeated, while the thunder rolled and crashed. The river, we saw during those brief flickers, was a roaring, whirling torrent. Trees, huge clumps of bamboo, driftwood of all shapes and sizes were being borne down on the angry surge, and from somewhere below came the deep throated bellow of countless waterfalls and rapids. We could no more cross the river at this point than walk alive through a flaming furnace.

"Lower down?" Grainger's voice, harsh, interrogatory, sounded in my ear.

I shouted back a negative. Lower down, the river, fed by an ever increasing number of side tributaries, would be even more formidable; there was nothing for it, therefore, but to retrace our steps and try higher up. Time would be wasted, with the added disadvantage that should we manage eventually to gain the opposite bank no path existed down to the bungalow on that side; we would have to hack our way, in the darkness, through virgin jungle. Anything, however, was better than waiting in our present position; we began our desperate journey up the path again.

We must have made close on three miles before we came to a point in the river where a crossing was just conceivable. Here, at last, we found that the Mae Fah was showing signs of falling, for the eddies, lighted by the faint flashes of lightning now far away to the south, seemed less violent. With frantic hands we tore strands of creeper with which to lash our rifles to our ponies' backs, and then we took the flood. Sunstar balked at the danger, a thing I had never known him do before, but I forced him in and the river closed over us.

My recollection of that crossing is confused. I was vaguely conscious of fighting with every inch of my body against the cold grip of the water; I seemed to go on fighting for an eternity, and my first clear remembrance is of my hand striking against an overhanging bough. That meant I had reached the opposite bank.

I pulled myself out, to find Sunstar unable to follow me and in danger of being swept away. I seized his bridle and drew him out of the sucking vortex. While he trembled beside me, I looked frantically round for signs of Grainger or the mare. I tried to shout, but the breath had left my body and my heart beats seemed to shatter my whole breast. I must not wait for them, I must not wait for them; I must get on—to that bungalow.

Riding being out of the question, and trusting that Sunstar would somehow follow me, I began to force my way through the tangled vegetation on the bank. I had made perhaps twenty yards when the mare loomed up on my left. She was utterly spent and reeled like a drunken thing, but of Grainger there was no sign. I stumbled down to where I judged the mare had emerged from the water. The white face of Grainger, pallid in the darkness, glimmered up at me. I stooped. The pale lightning flickered again, and I read anguish and entreaty in his eyes; he wished me to leave him to his fate—to go on.

Exerting the last of my remaining strength, I seized him by the arm and plucked him bodily out of the shallow backwash in which he was stranded.

We stood on the bank, our ponies beside us. An intense and extraordinary hush had fallen over the world. The thunder had passed, the rain had passed, the lightning had passed, leaving only the dripping of leaves and the silent darkness. For the moment sheer exhaustion tied us to one spot; the two and a half miles of jungle that still separated us from our

goal might have been five thousand; they loomed unconquerable.

We began the last stage of our nightmare journey. I lost sense of time, space, reality; I moved in a dream of pain. Fighting, fighting, fighting, always fighting—on and on and on through the interminable forest tangle.

Sand crunched beneath my feet. I had reached the sandy tributary that ran down one side of my compound. Sunstar was close behind me, my rifle still strapped on his back. I tore it off him, reloaded it with dry cartridges from my oilskin wallet, stumbled into the compound. A light in the bungalow was shining; that meant Mary Collins had not left after all. I reeled up the bungalow steps.

A figure met me at the top, the figure of a man. It was Malone. His eyes were fierce and determined, and the kindly, humorous lines round the mouth had vanished. The chill blue of a revolver glinted in his right hand.

"Grainger," he snapped. "Grainger! Where is he?"

In answer to the question Grainger himself swayed into the circle of light; his face was ghastly, but on the face of that other man I caught a quick expression of infinite relief.

"My God—and I'd feared—" he paused and looked intently, first at Grainger, then at myself. "It doesn't matter what I'd feared. You, Foster, seem to have come to your senses at last. That's all that matters now."

We had reached the bungalow in time, but the speaker must be warned of the pressing danger. And where was Mary Collins? I strove for words, yet none came, and I found myself listening, held by the unwonted power in that other man's eyes.

"Never thought to find me here, did you? No, but I'll tell you now why I am here." His voice rang commandingly. "This morning. In my forest. A note came, from the doctor, and the orderly who brought it nearly killed his pony. Something was happening in your valley, the doctor said, and Mary Collins had already ridden out there. He, the doctor, would be riding out in the evening by the cart road, but he couldn't get away before and so might be too late to prevent that something happening. You hear me?"

We stared at the speaker, Grainger and I. Conscious of a growing strangeness in events, we hung upon his words.

"I rode. I can ride sometimes, and with me went two native forest guides who knew of a short cut here. I commandeered ponies for them from a village, and we reached this bungalow at four. Mary Collins was in it, waiting—and she told me everything. Among other things, it appears that you, Foster, had left her here—*alone!*"

He paused meaningly, then went on:

"What was I to do? She couldn't stay here, nor could the natives, under the circumstances. So I sent her back with the guides to the cart road to meet her father and tell him I'd arrived. But she was brave. She refused to go, and it was only when she realized she'd be in the way that she consented. You understand that, both of you?"

The silence hung heavily. Only the thin trumpet of thousands of mosquitoes faintly tinged the air.

"She went at last," he continued. "And I was left here on my own. I could do nothing but wait—wait and see what happened, for I could no more cross that flooded river and follow you, Foster, than Mary could have done. I'd determined, though, to cross it as soon as it went down and ride to Grainger's bungalow, but there was a chance—a small chance—that you might be back here before I could do that. You, Foster, knew the river; I didn't. You might know of some point higher up where you could cross, and I didn't want to be surprised when—and if—you returned. I waited—" he tapped his revolver—"with this ready. You understand me? It's sometimes necessary to threaten if you have to arrest a man—for murder!"

He paused. His eyes were shining with a strange, ecstatic triumph; was this the same kindly, good humored man who had

visited me before in this very bungalow, who had talked and laughed with me on many a stay in Cha Kum?

"This," he repeated, again indicating his revolver, "I've told you I had it ready. And I used it. All six chambers. One — two — three — four — five — six. Come!"

He beckoned to us. We followed him into the living room. He took the oil lamp off the table and held it high above his head. The rays swept round the room, paused, fastened on an object on the floor at the back. Across the threshold of the door that led from the living room to the rear veranda the great killer tigress sprawled.

Terrible in life, she looked even more terrible now that death had taken her; the mouth was frozen in a ghastly snarl; the eyes, though glazed, still seemed to smolder with unquenchable hatred as the lamplight caught them. The whole body, tawny, sleek, horrifying, radiated unwholesomeness.

The ground was swaying beneath my feet, but I held on grimly to consciousness, for the man with the lamp was speaking again:

"She came this evening, barely half an hour after Mary had left. She sprang on to the rear veranda, and I heard her. I whirled from watching the river. I saw a great face coming at me through that door. I found myself firing—at that face. One, two, three, four, five, six—like that!

Don't remember aiming, even. Don't suppose I did aim. What the hell would have been the use? Five shots missed, I found afterward, but the sixth got her right through the heart. Can you beat that both of you? Me, the boob, the man who can't ride, who can't shoot, who can't do anything, bagging the tigress in the end! Proud? I'm as proud as Lucifer! And for two reasons. One of 'em's obvious, and I'll tell you the other. I—I've canceled that hellish bet of yours," cried Tommy Malone.

Chastened, relieved, weary, the arrogant Grainger hung his head.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MESSAGE

I STOOD on the veranda of my Cha Kum bungalow. The November evening was bright with mellow sunshine; red and yellow cannas, scarlet hibiscus, purple and white bougainvillea, splashed the compound with soft, rich color; everywhere beauty met the eye, yet my heart lay heavy within me. By my own action I had exiled myself from the company of those whose only wish had been to help me; by my own action I had destroyed forever the happy dreams in which I had so often indulged before the madness took me; work only remained, and in that work I would find refuge from thoughts of the past.

I thanked God that the morrow would find me back in the valley, back among my elephants and coolies and chainmen and mahouts. They would help me to forget.

It was nine weeks now since I had been brought in from the valley on the morning after the killer was slain. Again the walls of the hospital had enclosed me, but this time the hurt was in my tortured brain. Days and nights of perpetual darkness had followed, a darkness lighted by strange, dazzling flashes and peopled with things. I had fought with those things until my strength had been exhausted and I surrendered myself to an endless fall with them into space.

A great calm had ensued, and then, one bright morning in October, I had awakened to find sunshine, real sunshine, streaming across my bed.

The fever had left my brain and events came back to me in their true perspective; I saw myself as I must have been during those last few months in the valley; and this had made me pray for strength in order that I could return to that valley and stay there far away from those whom I had so greatly wronged.

I think it must have been my weakness, my utter physical weakness, that had made them all so kind to me during those

long days of convalescence: Mary and her father, old Trevor, Malone, the other jungle-wallas who had come in from their districts—not one of them had spoken a word of the past. Instead, cheery greetings, flowers, books, kindness added to kindness—it was that that had made it so confoundedly hard for me. They knew, and I knew that they knew.

The time came when I was strong enough to leave by rail for Bangkok. There a steamer awaited me—one of those little part cargo, part passenger boats that ply round the Gulf of Siam. The sea wind had fanned my temples, every breath of it sending new life pulsing through my veins. And now I was back today in Cha Kum, physically whole but with a great yearning emptiness in my heart.

The cannas, kissed by the evening breeze, bowed their heads in a stately dance. I watched them, but my ears were straining for the sound of hoofs on the road outside the compound. I had telegraphed from Bangkok for Grainger to ride in and meet me directly I returned to Cha Kum, which meant that he should have left the valley this morning. And I longed to see him again, for to him at least I could speak freely, and without shame.

He had haunted the hospital until I had been pronounced out of danger; I had learned that much during my convalescence. Then he had gone back to the valley with a haunted look on his features and eyes that had burned in strange contrast to the ashen pallor on his cheeks. They, those others, had seen him go with wonder, but I did not wonder—now. He had returned to sink himself in work, to cure himself with work. Illness had saved my reason; work should save his.

I turned from watching the cannas. Grainger was cantering in. With a crunch of hoofs the gray mare halted below me. He dismounted. I beckoned, and we walked into the living room, where we could talk undisturbed. I had expected to see a partly broken man; instead, I saw Ralph Grainger as I first had known him, keen, alert, springy, with a lurking devil in the eyes.

"Why, John—" a hand was clapped on my shoulder—"it's you again. I knew that directly I saw your old face staring over the railings. We'll have a drink on the strength of it. Got any whisky? Good! And you'll pour out those drinks as slowly as you can. Understand?"

I produced the necessary, and we drank.

"Got work going again in the valley?" I asked.

"Going again? Wait and see! And I took the liberty of bringing out your elephants and coolies from Cha Kum. Thought you'd like to have everything ready for you when you got back. Mind?"

That was Grainger's way of saying that he had been attending to my work as well as his own since I had been convalescing.

"Mind?" I echoed. "I'm only too glad."

"Well—" Grainger put his glass down on the table—"now we'll come to that little affair of ours. I suppose we ought to put our arms around each other's necks and slobber, but we're not going to do anything of the sort. I suppose I ought to say I'm sorry for starting the whole business, but why the hell should I say it? Man, I'm not sorry. Now that you're well again, at least," he hastened to add.

"Thanks for the qualification," I said.

He laughed.

"Can't you see why I'm not sorry? I got what I deserved. I baited you because it amused me, then damned if you didn't change before my eyes. The boot was on the other foot with a vengeance. That licking you gave me, for instance. You were—terrific. For the first time in my life I found myself really afraid of something—*you*. And my nerves were shaken, shaken so badly that then I lost my head. Result, neither of us believed the other when each of us was telling the absolute truth to the doctor about—" his face sobered—"about poor young Mannering. And that's mentioning only one incident out of a dozen."

"Grainger," I said, "you're bluffing.

Cut it out. You *are* sorry, but you won't confess it."

"Have it as you like," he answered. "I won't argue. But you won't find me changed when we get back to the valley. I warn you of that. I'll probably start baiting you again sooner or later, and you can lick me for all you're worth. Only keep your head afterward, that's the main point."

"So far," I said, after a pause, "you've only mentioned our two selves. I suppose you haven't given a thought to what the others must think of it all?"

"The others? We haven't harmed 'em, have we? Actually, we've given 'em the hell of a sensation. Life's pretty dull up here on the whole, and they ought to be thankful."

"Do you think Mary Collins is thankful?" I flashed at him.

Again the mocking tone left him.

"No," he said slowly. "No, I don't. You, of course, were more to blame than I in that last incident, but that was mere chance. It might have been either of us. And I understand how you must feel. But hasn't even that turned out for the best? Who helped her father when the sickness broke out in the villages north of here? Who obviously had an understanding all along with Mary about our own two selves? Who came out in the nick of time and saved her? Who bagged the killer? Who's going to win Mary because he deserves her, because he's the very men for her? Why, Tommy Malone, of course."

"Yes," I echoed dreamily, "Tommy Malone."

Grainger refilled our glasses and gazed pensively into his before drinking.

"You know, John, I only thought myself to be in love with her. And I'd never have made her happy. I see that now. Do I look like a man who'd make a woman happy?"

"No," I answered frankly, "you don't."

"What's my life, really? What are the things that matter—to me? I'll tell you—rivers and thunder and galloping horses; whisky and elephants; tigers and work; that's about all, I reckon. But it's enough. And Mary?" he shrugged his shoulders. "I imagined that she was—interested, shall we say? I suppose she was in a way—"

"Because you used to show off in front of her."

"No. The real reason was that she felt I ought to be mothered. I was the bad boy of the family, so to speak, and I needed a bit of reform. But as for love—" he laughed—"it needs a man very different from me to get the love of a girl like Mary Collins. And a good job too—for her, bless her."

I drained my glass and rose to my feet.

"Sunstar's down below," I said quickly. "He's been putting on too much weight, and I want you to have a look at him."

WE RODE out at dawn the next morning. I was anxious to start early, and I think Grainger understood. Both Tommy Malone and Trevor were in Cha Kum, and I did not wish to run the chance of meeting either of them; as for those two who lived in the little hospital, the white gates at the entrance would never again open for me.

Had I been wrong—I asked myself—not to have called in and said goodby to Mary this morning? During my illness the past had never been hinted at, but now that I was well again should I not have seen her and at least tried to express something of the grief I felt? No, the answer came to me, what would have been the use? Mere words would have proved utterly inadequate, whereas the fact of my leaving without seeing her would speak for itself, and she would understand. Of course she would understand.

Grainger's hand was on my bridle. We were to take the ride out easily, he was saying; I'd a lot of leeway to catch up yet before I could think of making our old hell for leather journeys; it was time for a halt and breakfast.

We ate the meal at the side of the road. We had scarcely finished it when to our

surprise a man came galloping up in our tracks. He sat his pony atrociously, and it needed no second glance to tell us it was Tommy Malone. He dismounted beside us.

"You're a fine pair," said he. "Sneaking off like this without letting any of us know. What's the great idea?"

To my relief Grainger spoke for me:

"Guess our work's a bit behindhand, Tommy. Five months, to be exact."

"Then an extra two days won't matter. Come on back. We want a four at bridge. And you, John, have got to come back anyhow. Mary Collins wants to see you. An urgent message for you, so she told me. That's why I've ridden out."

"For me?" I echoed in amazement.

"Yes, you great oaf," Grainger was speaking. "For you, so he says. Come on. We'll all go back. Olive branch extended, and all that sort of thing. Get on your pony, John."

In vain I expostulated. They hustled me on to Sunstar, and an hour later we were in Cha Kum again. At the the hospital Grainger and Tommy left me, and I went through the gates alone. I, who had sworn that very morning never to reenter them. An orderly received me, and I was ushered into Mary's private room. She was busy for the moment, it appeared, but he would tell her of my presence. The orderly salaamed and withdrew.

What could be the message? I wondered. It must be an urgent one for her to have sent out Tommy after me. I half regretted that I had returned. Then I heard the door open. Mary Collins came in.

"Why, John—" her clear blue eyes scanned my face anxiously—"so you have come back to say goodby. They told me you'd left—some of the coolies saw you riding out first thing in the morning—"

Why was she speaking like this when it was she herself who had brought me back?

"You know why I'm here," I said. "Because of the message you sent out by Tommy Malone."

She looked puzzled.

"A message?" she echoed. "By Tommy Malone? I haven't even seen him today."

It was my turn to be surprised.

"But he rode out and said you wanted to see me urgently."

"He did that?" She gazed dreamily out into the sunshine for a full minute; when she spoke again her cheeks were flooded with color. "John, that means you never came to see me of your own accord."

I made no answer.

"Can't you see that I'm bound to be just a little bit disappointed?"

"And can't you see my point of view?" I said. "Look at me. Do you think I haven't gone through hell? Do you think I'm not going through hell now? Was I to come in and babble words to you about being sorry—sorry for having sunk myself as I did? Mary, I rode out like that because I cared so much."

"Can you keep a secret?" she asked unexpectedly.

"I hope so."

"You'll swear to me that you'll never mention a word to any living soul of what I'm going to tell you?"

I promised her.

"Tommy," she began slowly, "Tommy Malone came to see me while you were away down south after you had left the hospital. He told me that he loved me. And that, he said, was why he understood me. He was not asking me to marry him, but just to allow him to help me in any way he could."

Mary paused. The room was very still. Only from the garden outside came the faintest whisper of wind.

"He said," she went on, "that he knew. He made no explanation of what he knew, because that was obviously unnecessary under the circumstances. John, what was I to do or say? It seemed to me, then, that he could do nothing. I just thanked him, and he left for his forest again. Dear man, he went with his humorous smile and some quaint remark about the weather as if nothing had ever happened. But he'll have his reward. I often think God must have some special little heaven for men like him."

SHE SIGHED, then walked swiftly over to her desk. Her attitude of wistful reflection had changed to one of set purpose. She turned from the desk. A letter was in her hand.

"Read that," she commanded.

I took the letter from her; it was in my own handwriting, and addressed to her. It was one of those letters I had written on the night I had decided to go out to my death.

My illness had blotted out certain details of the past as though they had never existed; the letters were one of them. I had, I now remembered with a shock akin to fear, left those letters in my forest bungalow, and Mary must have seen them there after I had ridden out to Ralph Grainger. One had been addressed to her; what more natural then than for her to open it? The others, so far as I recollected, had been for Trevor and Malone; they were solely concerned with the disposal of my effects, and as such were unimportant. Indeed, they had probably been destroyed long ago by the men who had received them, but why had this letter been kept, and kept for me to read?

I began reading it. Each separate word stabbed through my brain like fire. That I, John Foster, could have penned such words seemed inconceivable; yet there they were, in my own big hand, staring at me from the whiteness of the paper.

"John," the fingers that took back the letter trembled a little, "in this you said that you loved me. You said also that you hated me. Do you still hate me?"

I think she saw the pain in my eyes, for her manner changed.

"No," she whispered. "You never hated me. But, John, why are you so silent? Won't you answer the other side of that question? Have I got to make you speak, to make you tell me what I've longed to hear for years and years and years? I almost wish you'd occasionally behave a little more like—no, not quite that, but—can't you see now why Tommy rode out and told you that beautiful lie? I'd lost you once; I was losing you again, and he knew, and he *did* find a way of helping me."

I understood. She awaited that other answer. I would give it her.

I said never a word, but held out my arms for her.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PEACE TO TIGER VALLEY

THE JANUARY sunshine flooded Cha Kum; it shone into the hospital in a blaze of glory, revealing in searching detail every line in the little doctor's face. He held out his right hand to me:

"Goodby," said he. "Take care of her, John."

They were waiting there in the compound for me: Sunstar and the black, old Trevor and Malone. Our honeymoon was over, and now she and I were riding back to the valley and the life that would be both old and new. Trevor came up, and with him the atmosphere changed.

"I'd ride out with you part of the way, old chap," he wheezed. "Only part of the way, I said, so don't look so glum. But this sciatica of mine; it's the deuce, I tell you. I've half a mind to leave the East for good next year. Plays hell with a man. Why, it nearly—"

He broke off suddenly, and flushed crimson.

"Go on," I smiled. "Say that it nearly got me."

He roared with laughter, then lapsed into gravity. "Well, I won't be keeping you. Goodby, and the very best of everything to both of you."

Mary and I were left with Tommy.

"You'll come out and see us sometimes, Tommy?"

He laughed, and he laughed whole heartedly, as though he were really happy. I had won my heart's desire; perhaps he had his own strange way. I don't think I ever quite understood Tommy Malone.

"Off with you both," he bellowed, "or I'll burst into song."

We rode through the white gates of the hospital compound, and both Mary and I were glad when the marketplace rose ahead. Light words are hard to come by when a tiny, hidden sadness lurks deep down in the heart.

Mary was riding Sunstar. I dug my heels into the old black's flanks. He responded with a will. The road ribboned in front of me. I flung one word back over my shoulder.

"Ride!" I called to her.

Sunstar drew up on me; for a short space we raced level, then with a thunder of hoofs he had gone up the road, leaving me nowhere. Far ahead of me I saw Mary check him. He turned in his own length as only a polo pony can. His peerless stride ate up the distance between us. A clatter of hoofs, another lightning turn, and we were galloping side by side.

"Isn't he just glorious?" I heard Mary's voice through the singing of the wind.

"And you can ride," I shouted back.

We reached the turning to the valley. Here tiffin awaited us, brought out by my carrier coolies. We ate in the sunbeams splashing through the trees, then rode on down the bridle path. The sun was dipping over the hills as we reached my forest bungalow.

Grainger had thought of everything. Bungalow and compound blazed with flowers, while the fringing jungle had been cut back by the work of countless hands. My dear old Lao cook was there, wearing a grin across his ugly features that nearly split them in two; I saw my syce, my boys, my compound coolies—all the old, familiar faces were back as though they had never left me.

We gazed out over the veranda, Mary and I. In the distance I could hear the rumbling and trumpeting of my elephants as they cleared the stacks to north and south; on our right the village once again echoed with life and laughter, for the cartmen and mahouts and chainmen had taken over the deserted homes for their own brown families, and the sight was good to look upon. Yet where was Ralph Grainger, who had done all this for us?

He came. He broke the forest surface on the opposite side of the Mae Fah. The gray mare's hoofs lashed the shallow water, running golden in the sunset. He thundered over the compound, drew rein and gazed up at us.

"Like it here?" He grinned.

"Like it! I'd never dreamt—" Mary began.

"Thanks. That's all I wanted to know. No, I won't stay. Think I'm a fool? Now watch me, you two."

He turned the mare and headed her straight for a tall bamboo fence that had been erected at the bottom of the compound. He took that fence with an inch to spare, and a second later the mare was slithering down the bank and into the river again. For sheer, reckless bravado I never saw Ralph Grainger's equal, but he came through unscathed and gained the farther bank. I saw the flash of his helmet as he waved goodby, then the sound of the mare's hoofs died away to the northward.

The light faded. The trees were already asleep and, entranced, I gazed at their strange loveliness. Mary's hand stole into mine. Peace had come to tiger valley.

THE END

The PRINCE

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

THE THUNDER of the guns had died away long since; the two ships rolled gently side by side to the long Atlantic swell, with the peak of Teneriffe breaking the southern horizon. The Spaniard, a large galleass bound for the Azores, was yielding up the provisions, wine and trade goods of which O'Brien had need, and his buccaneers were plundering her lazaret and cabins.

O'Brien stood at her poop rail; to one side were gathered her officers and passengers, eyeing him half in fear, half in wonder. They had not expected to be set free to go their ways in their own ship, for such was not the wont of buccaneers. They watched this tall, slim figure in its sky-blue velvet and fine Mechlin lace, almost incredulously.

"Colonel O'Brien!" bawled a voice from the waist. "One o' they slaves wants to speak with 'ee!"

"Send him up," said O'Brien curtly.

He looked down at the men there, his own men, who were freeing certain slaves of their irons, sending them aboard his own ship, free men. He who had been a slave himself knew their feelings.

One of them mounted the poop ladder —a slender, tanned figure, moving with graceful agility, handsome head well poised, a short and curly brown beard framing a youthful face. He stood before O'Brien and his quick, sure eyes warmed in a smile.

of BARBARY

A Story of O'Brien in the Land of the Moors

"Señor, I owe you thanks for my freedom," he said in courteous Spanish.

O'Brien was struck by his aspect—by the look of perfect physical and mental balance shown by perhaps one man in a thousand. He had yet to learn that there was one race of people among whom this frank and open expression was the rule rather than the exception, and that among them it was no index whatever to character.

"Who are you?" he demanded curiously.

"I am named Raschid, and my father is Mulai Ismail, Emperor of Morocco."

O'Brien broke into a laugh.

"And I am the Sultan of Stamboul!" he exclaimed. "Come, my friend, you must try a better one than that to catch this fish."

Raschid gestured with a certain dignity.

"Ask those Spaniards yonder, señor."

O'Brien frowned at him, then approached the Spanish captain.

"Señor," he said, "this man tells me that he is of high birth among his own people. I request you, of your goodness, to tell me what you know of him."

"It is true, señor," said the Spaniard gloomily. "He is Prince Raschid of Barbary, a slave whom we were carrying to the governor of the islands as a gift from Don Hernando de Sol, the governor of Tetuan."

O'Brien rejoined his freedman at the

rail and inspected him with curiosity.

"Do you desire to join my crew, then?" he asked. "My lieutenant is a vicomte; I could manage with a prince, mayhap."

Raschid laughed.

"No, señor, I would have you return me to my own country. The pasha at Sale will gladly pay you a ransom—"

"Go aboard my ship," said O'Brien. "We will talk of this later."

Raschid went his way, with a flash of white teeth. Presently the Spanish captain, who was a brave and courteous man, came to O'Brien.

"Señor Capitan," he said, "you have been merciful to us, and I will pay you back with a warning. Beware of that Moor! He was to have been ransomed at Tetuan, but there was some treachery attempted—I know not the exact details. He is a stubborn and a bloody dog of an infidel and has an artful tongue."

O'Brien, who had his own opinion of Spaniards, thanked the captain for his warning, presented him again with his ship and presently turned his men from their task and drove them aboard their own craft. While St. Rocher headed the ship eastward, O'Brien worked over the four wounded men, for he had some surgical skill. Then he went to the cabin and was taking his ease with a long pipe when St. Rocher entered.

"Well, Colonel, better decide upon a course."

St. Rocher, who had known O'Brien in the old days as a colonel of the Irish Brigade, could not forget the fact. Now that both of them were plain piratical buccaneers, with James II reigning at St. Germain and his unlucky Irish gentlemen scattered to the four winds, they were no less "colonel" and "vicomte" to each other. It was the only pretense that O'Brien kept up, this pretense of rank and birth; for, as he truly said, there was need of something to keep them all from going to the devil.

"What matter the course?" said O'Brien. "We're not far from where Sir Richard Grenville went down; I'd like to die as well, under Spanish guns!"

"Devil take Spanish guns," and St. Rocher laughed gaily. "By the way, what's this about a Moorish prince? Is he the young fellow with a beard?"

O'Brien nodded.

"Let's have a glass of wine and have him down. He mentioned a ransom."

So Raschid presently joined them, looking very different in the garments he had taken from Spanish cabins: clean, white skinned, blue of eye.

"I always fancied Moors were dark of skin," said O'Brien bluntly. Raschid laughed.

"We call ourselves Arabs, señor, not Moors. True, my father is somewhat dark, but my mother, Laila Aziz, is an English woman."

"Eh?" O'Brien was startled. "English?"

"She is the second wife of Mulai Ismail, señor—stolen from England when she was a girl. She is his favorite wife, and her palace at Meknes is an abode of splendor. Yes, we have many English in our country, both slaves and renegades. You are English?"

"No," snapped O'Brien. "I am Irish, which is another thing entirely. So we can have a ransom for you, can we?"

"A large one," responded Raschid simply. "The Spaniards demanded one, but after it had been paid they sent me away on that ship, by night, and said I had died of the plague. One of my brothers is kaid of Rabat; he will gladly pay a ransom in gold or in slaves."

"How many brothers have you?" demanded St. Rocher, with an eye to the prince's worth.

"Three or four hundred, I think."

"Eh?" O'Brien scowled, for he did not like such jesting. "None of your facetious remarks, now—"

Raschid broke into a laugh.

"Pardon! I forgot you knew nothing of our country. My father has five hundred wives, who are retired to Tarudent at the age of thirty."

That he was entirely serious was evident. St. Rocher whistled and lifted his glass.

"We must drink his health, then—to the father of his country. Ismail! *Salut!*"

O'Brien laughed.

"My faith, I've half a notion to visit this emperor."

"What?" Raschid broke into eager speech. "You would visit our country? Good! Take your ship to Sale or Rabat, which is the same thing but vastly different; obtain my ransom. Send gifts to my father, and he will send you a safe-conduct—he likes to talk with foreigners. You must be an ambassador, of course. My brother at Rabat will shelter you. There are French and Dutch merchants there, and consuls as well, and—"

"And if your pasha did not turn his guns on us, as Christians, then the Christians would have us hung as pirates!" broke in St. Rocher, with grim truth in his jest. "Still, Colonel, we have all that lading we took out of the galleon; and the afterhold is crammed with that mass of trading goods we took off the Portuguese carrack—you had some idea of taking it to New England—"

"Excellent!" approved O'Brien, and looked at Raschid. "Will your people trade for cloth and ironwork and pretty things?"

"Gladly, señor, and at high prices. And if you have jewels to sell, there is no better market in the world."

O'Brien exchanged a glance with his lieutenant. They had jewels to sell, indeed—a whole coffer filled with Spanish loot. So they talked further, and then dismissed the prince, and eyed one another. O'Brien scraped out his pipe, a smile touching his sharp features.

"I see it's got you," said St. Rocher, and he nodded response.

"My faith, but it has! He says this emperor stays a long way inland; I'd have to leave you with the ship."

"Pox on the ship," said St. Rocher, with a shrug. "I see greater things ashore. Let her cruise for a month and then come back after us. Fox is a good man, has been in a King's ship, and understands navigation."

"Get out the charts and let's see where this Sale, or Rabat, is," said O'Brien. "Salee, we called it in English. That's where the Salee rovers hail from, eh? Pirate against pirate."

Thus began an adventure destined to drift into sheer madness—and to carve the name of Colonel James O'Brien deeply in the rocks of Barbary—and beyond.

BY THE TIME they raised the high cliffs of the Barbary coast, on a warm November day, O'Brien had learned a great deal about the land ahead; and the more he learned, the more his appetite to see it was whetted. But this did not prevent him clearing the ship for action when they sighted a large ship, apparently Dutch, bearing down from the north with a light but steady breeze. As Raschid said, she was more like to be a captured Dutchman used by the corsairs.

Fox had been schooled to his part. He was the one man in this motley crew of Irish, English Jacobite and French who could navigate and command a ship; a lean, dark man, he was very capable when not in liquor.

Since his escape from English and Spanish hands alike, O'Brien had been plying the trade of buccaneer for some ten months, and his present ship, the *Kestrel*, he had taken from a St. Malo corsair, together with some very choice lading still in her hold. The *Kestrel* carried ten heavy guns to a side, a somewhat extraordinary armament to be in private hands; and if the Malouin had been able to work his twenty guns as well as St. Rocher worked six, she would never have been taken. What was more to the point, half of the twenty were masked in the 'tween-decks, and ordinarily out of sight, so that if necessity arose the *Kestrel* was as good as any double tiered frigate, while looking like an ordinary trader.

The Dutchman bore down with evident intent to speak, but the flutter of Moslem robes along her decks betrayed her true nature. O'Brien had no mind to waste his men's lives, and hove to, as he could well afford. The Moors came on

suspiciously enough, until Raschid leaped into the shrouds with a speaking trumpet and sent a long, musical call across the water. After a brief exchange of shouted words, the Moor came up into the wind and her captain carried on a lengthy dialogue with Raschid.

"*Ma foi!*" observed St. Rocher, standing beside O'Brien and Fox on the quarterdeck. "We're somewhat in this fellow's hands, my friend!"

"Nothing venture, nothing win," said O'Brien. "There—they've finished."

Raschid approached them, his face beaming.

"That is the chief ship of Sale and Rabat," he exclaimed in Spanish. "They will lead us into the river—we can cross the Bou Rougreg bar. I told them who I was, and that you were ambassadors from the Irish nation come to visit my father. We need fear nothing."

And so, for the moment, it proved. While naturally somewhat off in his longitude, since no system of determining longitude had yet been invented, O'Brien was right enough in his latitude, and the twin corsair cities were not thirty miles distant. In ten minutes both vessels were standing along for the coast.

Although Raschid had been a prisoner in Tetuan for close to a year, he had only recently departed thence, so he knew the exact status of affairs in Morocco, where Ismail sat in Meknes, endlessly building with his sixty thousand slaves and uncounted thousands of conscript laborers, and the great kaids and pashas governed the country in semi-independent state.

His eyes flashing eagerly, he now joined O'Brien and St. Rocher in the cabin at noon meat, and detailed affairs ahead, not for the first time.

"We must have nothing to do with Sale, remember," he said. "It is the new town. Rabat, the old Sale, dominates it. There is Pasha Abdallah, who governs for my brother Yusuf, the kaid of the district. If Yusuf is in Rabat, well and good; he is my friend. If he is away, then I will handle Abdallah. Leave everything to me. What ransom do you ask for me?"

"None," said O'Brien, with the grand air which so became him. "I do not ransom a friend."

"Eh?" Raschid stared blankly. "But that is madness! Collect a ransom—let us say, a thousand pieces of gold. My father is a miser who can well afford to be milked, so do not throw away such a chance. Once ashore, you shall have to wait in Rabat until messengers go to Meknes and return with Ismail's safe-conduct; it will be some weeks. You must have gifts for the pasha, of course, and others for Yusuf if he is there. And be in no haste. We must have Abdallah's permission before any trading can be done. Any ships without a safe-conduct may be plundered, but not this one. I shall see to that."

When the two of them were alone, St. Rocher regarded his friend whimsically.

"Eh, Colonel? Our crow is becoming an eagle. Are you uneasy?"

"If I were a simple trader I'd be devilish uneasy!" And O'Brien's rare smile flashed forth. "Let the boy handle things; why not? We've no other interpreter."

"If anything went wrong, we'd be helpless."

"Before we're helpless," said O'Brien coolly, "somebody will get hurt, my Vicomte!"

And with this St. Rocher had to be content.

It was close to sunset when the Rougreg River mouth opened out ahead—a little stream no larger than the Shannon, where the Roman city of Sala Colonia had stood. Now, on the hill to the north, stood Sale, glittering white; and to the south on the cliff which rose sheer out of the river, the great citadel of Rabat, with the steep hillside beyond it running down to the sea and dotted with stones—a huge cemetery was here.

Their guide showed them the passage across the bar, and the tide being at flood, the *Kestrel* made it very neatly. At the base of the Rabat cliff was a massive fort commanding the entrance. Beyond this were batteries. In the fairway were two

Dutch ships, traders, at anchor, and up beyond in the river itself showed half a dozen rakish native craft. But the two men on the quarterdeck stared at none of these things, but at something beyond, straight up the river.

"Do you see it, or do I dream?" said St. Rocher. "It is incredible! It must be all of two miles away, and yet it towers—"

"Exactly like a tower," and O'Brien chuckled. Then he beckoned Raschid, and pointed to the enormous square tower whose tiles glittered gaudily in the sunset. "What is that thing? Is it a tower indeed, or part of some building?"

"It is part of the dead city built five hundred years ago—the Tower of Hassan, all that remains of a great mosque," returned Raschid, staring at it likewise. "It was built by the architect of the Giralda at Seville; now it serves as a watch tower, indeed. Now anchor, quickly."

O'Brien woke up and hurled an order at Fox. The *Kestrel* came to rest, and when her canvas was furled, her crew crowded along the rail, staring. Boats were coming out from shore, a whole swarm of them, bearing fresh fruit of all sorts. The other ship had cast anchor a cable length distant; her captain was already speeding ashore in a boat, and he met one coming from the fort, stopping to make report. Then the other came on toward the *Kestrel*, where Raschid leaned over the rail and exchanged rapid talk with the marveling bumboatmen. Provisions came pouring over the rail, and Fox paid as Raschid indicated.

The boat from the fort came alongside, and after a few words Raschid turned.

"I will go ashore with them, señores! Let no one aboard until you hear from me."

And, with no more ado, he swarmed down a line into the boat and was gone.

DARKNESS had scarce fallen when there was a soft hail overside in French, and to the deck mounted a man who was brought at once to the cabin. He proved to be one Pierre Santin, a Bordeaux merchant and acting French consul in Rabat —a position of some account, as the French were high in favor with the emperor at Meknes.

"I am to see the pasha in an hour and give him some account of the Irish nation, messieurs," he said dryly to O'Brien and St. Rocher and Fox. "So I came to discover something about you. What is this farce?"

O'Brien laughed, seated him at the cabin table and passed the wine.

"I am James O'Brien, formerly colonel in the Irish Brigade, and Chevalier of St. Michel. This is M. le Vicomte de St. Rocher. Here is Captain Fox of this vessel. You might tell the pasha that Ireland is a country at the end of the world, whose people believe that hell is a place of snow and ice. M. de St. Rocher and I are curious to visit Meknes, while Captain Fox has some goods of value and some jewels to sell."

"And you have a hundred-odd men aboard, eh?" Santin winked knowingly. "Monsieur, let us be frank. If your trading goods are consigned to me, it will save you trouble, at a small percentage. I'll send a Jew aboard you in the morning to take the jewels off your hands."

"Agreed," said O'Brien promptly. "We anticipate no trouble, having brought Prince Raschid back—"

Santin threw up his hands.

"*Diable!* You do not trust him? He is capable of anything, that young man! You know that the emperor has a bodyguard of fifty thousand black slaves, trained to perfection? Last year this Raschid led five thousand of them against the Beni Zoar, a Berber tribe. He took their chief stronghold and massacred above ten thousand people gathered there, chiefly women and children. That is young Raschid for you! There were piles of Berber heads in every city of Maroc."

O'Brien bent a sharp scrutiny upon him.

"Is this possible? He seemed so mild, so frank and open—"

"Bah! That is the Moor for you—always smiling, always ready to knife

you," said Santin. "Look you, now! This Pasha Abdallah is an old wolf, in full charge here, as Kaid Yusuf is somewhere in the hills, hunting. These people understand only one thing—blood! Abdallah will send men aboard you. He will demand a deposit of your arms and powder. Then he will loot the ship and take the men as slaves—all slaves in the country are the personal property of the mad emperor, you comprehend. Yield but a little to these people, and they will take everything."

"What do you suggest, then?"

"Me? I suggest nothing, except that your lading be consigned to me. You two gentlemen, as ambassadors, are safe enough. The rest of you, and the ship, is as good as lost this moment. Raschid will betray you without a scruple, unless you hold him by oaths on the Koran and his father's beard. Remember, you are Christians, and therefore sent by Allah as the prey of true believers. And you are under the guns of the fort, while on the signal platform up above are mounted fifty guns that command the harbor."

"Guns are no threat," said O'Brien. "It's the gunners that count. Are they good?"

"Execrable," admitted Santin. "Their powder is no good, either. Well, I must be off. It is agreed, then. I'll tell his Excellency all manner of stories about Ireland, and if your presents are worthwhile, ambassadors are safe enough. He'll send tomorrow to land your presents and personal belongings, perhaps to land you as well. Then he'll open his jaws for the ship, I warn you. Remember, messieurs, only a strong and bloody hand prevails in Maroc!"

When the consul had departed, St. Rocher grimaced.

"I am beginning to lose interest in this black emperor with blue eyes," he observed.

"Do you believe in omens?" said O'Brien thoughtfully. "You heard what that man said at the last. Well, do you know what the O'Brien motto is? In Irish, it reads: *Lamh laidir an uachtar*, which is to say, The Strong Hand Above. Now, if that isn't an omen, what is it?"

"A good epitaph," said St. Rocher, with a laugh.

O'Brien slept little that night. When the sun lifted above the rosy, gleaming Tower of Hassan, he came on deck and summoned Fox, the boatswain, the gunner and a dozen of the chief men about him on the quarterdeck.

"Lads, St. Rocher and I will go ashore today. Now, look yonder!" He pointed upward to the great gun platform and signal station, at the crest of the black cliff above them. "Fifty heavy guns are mounted up there—but they can't be depressed sufficiently to command any ship close in to the cliff. Remember this! As for this fort at the base of the cliff, one double shotted broadside will silence it for a time.

"Now, I don't know what will happen; but you're to let no armed Moors aboard here after we go, without a written order from me. No cargo is to be broken out, without my order likewise. And keep a man posted to watch that platform up above. If you see either me or St. Rocher at the edge of that platform, waving a kerchief, it means to go. Slip your cable then or with the next ebb, pour your shot into the fort and into that ship yonder, and work out close to the cliff. You understand?"

"Aye," said Fox. "But what of you? We'll not leave you—"

"You will if I order it," said O'Brien. "Go your ways and come back here a month from the day you leave, flying a green flag. Either you'll find a welcome and word of me, or you'll be met with cannon—in which case, go and come back in another thirty days. If cannon still meet you, then you'll know that we're done for, and the ship is yours. Understood?"

"Aye," said Fox, with a dour look at the battlements up the river. "But I'd guarantee to land our men and go through that rat nest in an hour's time!"

"So speaks the terrier; but rats can

bite," said O'Brien curtly. "Remember your orders."

He was still speaking when a large pinnace was observed coming from the landing upriver, a smaller boat following it closely. The ladder was put down, and in the stern of the pinnace they made out Raschid, now clad in Moorish robes of purest white, and beside him a red bearded Moor in a faded green *djellab*. Once alongside Raschid mounted, and behind him came the other, with a wide grin.

"*Buenas dias, señores!*" exclaimed Raschid gaily. "This is the Sharif el Benouna, a descendant of the Prophet, on whom be peace! He is the vizier of the pasha and commander of his guards and comes to conduct you and your goods ashore. He will leave a score of his men aboard to guard the ship—"

"He will not," said O'Brien. "No guards come aboard the ship, nor any other armed men, except with a written order from me. After we have talked with the pasha, this may be arranged."

Raschid looked somewhat taken aback, and from this instant O'Brien suspected him. He exchanged a few words with the grinning, red bearded sharif, and then assented.

"Very well, señor. About the ransom, we will talk later; this has been demanded, and will be paid by the pasha. I understand your cargo is consigned to the French consul? Excellent. And here, following, is a Jew come to buy your jewels. He speaks French."

The Jew, one Ben Hassim, came aboard—an old man in black cap and *djellab*. St. Rocher took him down to the cabin, while O'Brien remained to see the packs and cases of goods, all long since made ready and marked, sent over into the pinnace. He eyed Raschid, meantime, and observed that this young man was somewhat changed; a certain imperious, eager air sat upon him, and in his eyes glowed a spark as of hidden fires. Still, it was natural that a prince delivered out of slavery would be a new man.

"Have messengers been sent to Meknes?" O'Brien asked him.

"They departed last night, señor, after the pasha had talked with the French consul." And he laughed. "We have made out a great case for your embassy!"

It occurred to O'Brien that if this man were treacherous he knew far too much.

Presently St. Rocher appeared and drew O'Brien aside. The Jew was taking all the jewels and plate and would smuggle them ashore that night. Did O'Brien want cash or bills of exchange on Meknes or Paris? The amount was large, and O'Brien whistled at the size of it.

"Half in cash, to be paid Fox when the jewels go ashore," he returned. "The remainder in wines and stores of all kinds, to be placed aboard immediately. Arrange prices with him."

He arranged with Fox to divide the money among the men upon its receipt. He was taking with him plenty of Spanish doubloons, and Fox could land at one of the Canaries to give the men a bit of shore play.

The Jew took his departure, his coming and going apparently unseen by the sharif; and the men came crowding around to say goodby to O'Brien and St. Rocher. A last handshake with Fox, and they were over the side. As he came into the pinnace O'Brien unavoidably jostled a Moor, who turned and spat in his face.

O'Brien's fist took him squarely in the mouth and knocked him sprawling, senseless. A welling tide of blood came from his mouth as he lay, and one of his fellows lifted his head, then said something. A burst of laughter came from the others.

"What is it?" O'Brien said to Raschid, and the latter grinned.

"His tongue is bitten through—it saves me the trouble of having it cut off in punishment."

O'Brien began to dislike these laughing bearded men who had peculiar ideas of humor.

THEY came ashore at the landing before the river gate of the tremendous battlements, and passed up the hill, along tortuous, narrow streets, the sharif's guards clearing the way with brutal musket butts. As they passed a deeply recessed doorway, Santin appeared and fell in step with O'Brien.

"I have arranged to get the most valuable of your goods from the ship tonight," he said in French. "Anything can be done here, with bribes."

"Then you'll need an order from me," said O'Brien.

"I'll send it for your signature by a slave, before noon."

O'Brien nodded, and the other swung off.

"Don't speak any Spanish," he called back. "There are many renegades hereabouts."

Santin, at least, was a true friend, and stood to profit by his fidelity.

Passing up the Street of the Consuls, where were throngs of wretched Christian slaves of all nations, who pelted them with appeals for help, they came to the entrance of the *kasba*, or citadel, atop the cliff over the river. As they approached it, St. Rocher caught his breath.

"I have seen many marvels," he observed in Spanish, "but never the like of this gate!"

Raschid gave him a look and a smile.

"This is less than nothing," he said. "Wait until you see Meknes, which my father has been building for twenty years!"

O'Brien doubted, and rightly. This tremendous gateway, with its magnificent tiles and sculptures, was in truth a monument to Andalusian-Moorish art; but other marvels lay ahead. Once inside the enormous guardroom, they turned right and glimpsed the crowded warren of low buildings where lived the garrison families, with the great gun platform out beyond; then turned right again and entered the lordly palace of the pasha. As they went, Raschid told how in the old days the corsairs had established a republic of their own, here and at Sale opposite, and how their freedom had been washed out in blood; but O'Brien paid little heed to this history.

Ahead of them appeared fairyland—gardens and pools and fountains, gay tilework, Dutch and French slaves at work among the flowers. All about these gardens were the palace quarters, the machicolated walls rising high above and around, their cannon trained upon the lower town. In one of these three sided rooms, whose arched fourth wall opened upon the gardens, the two ambassadors found themselves quartered. Here were their personal belongings and their gifts for the pasha; the packets destined for Meknes had been taken elsewhere, as Raschid informed them.

"You are free to go about the palace as you will," he said, "but do not pass the gates. The pasha will doubtless send for you this afternoon. *Adios!*"

He departed, and left them besieged by black slaves, who treated them to a bathing and barbering, fetched them sherbets and cakes and great earthen pots of stewed meat and fowl, and who regarded O'Brien's beloved pipes and tobacco with open awe. Refreshed and regaled, they sauntered out into the gardens—and very magnificent figures they made. O'Brien was in his favorite sky-blue velvet, and warm it was, wearing his Spanish rapier with the chased golden hilt, and a jeweled poniard; while the saturnine St. Rocher was in black Genoa cut velvet, with less showy but more serviceable weapons. And each of them, beneath his doublet, carried a brace of fine little brass pistolets, freshly loaded, and loose powder in a pocket for priming.

A great procession cut across a corner of the gardens and, following to the gates, they saw the pasha holding court in the guardroom. Him they could not see, for he sat at the great gate overlooking the town; but the results of his justice appeared in men being flogged on the feet, and two unhappy wretches whose right hands were lopped off.

"I perceive," said St. Rocher, turning

away, "that one needs a stout stomach in this land."

A slave sought them out soon after—a black man who spoke French, and who came from Santin with the document to be signed. O'Brien complied, and they returned to their own quarters, for the sun was hot and the stench of the town, even in the garden, was strong. And here, when the heat of the day was past, Raschid sought them out. Slaves fetched fragrant mint tea and left them alone.

"I have news," said Raschid abruptly. "Word has come from my brother Yusuf that he will arrive when he can—which may be tomorrow or next month. Meantime, it will be wise to humor Pasha Abdallah; flatter him, be not brusk or imperative. If he wishes to send men aboard the ship, let him do so. In any case, it will do no good to resist."

"No?" said O'Brien dryly. "We are in no case to resist, my friend."

"That is true," said Raschid, plucking at his beard. "I have prevailed upon the pasha to pay the ransom at once—a thousand pieces of gold, for which he will, of course, draw upon my father's treasury. It might be well for you to give him half of this sum."

"Our little eagle now becomes a vulture," murmured St. Rocher in French.

"By all means," assented O'Brien smoothly. "Your advice is good, Raschid. How do you find it here? You have been welcomed as a prince?"

A peculiar smile twisted the lips of the prince.

"I am well known, of course," he said, his voice silky. "Any son of Ismail, being of the sacred blood of Idris, can do as he will in this land. One of my brothers, indeed, the kaid of Tarudent and Sus, has been in practical rebellion for years—Master of Marrakesh. So long as he is content, my father cares not; revenues come in regularly, and what Ismail chiefly loves is gold."

"You are going to Meknes with us?" asked St. Rocher. The prince hesitated.

"I am not sure," he said slowly. "Things may happen; only God knows the event. You may yet see me enjoying more power than any of us dreamed."

He abruptly rose and departed. St. Rocher gave O'Brien a shrewd look.

"What do you make of it?"

"Treachery," said O'Brien bluntly. "He's a different man."

"Naturally; why not? He said too much in that last remark. Princely brethren are never friends, and unless I miss my guess, the absence of Kaid Yusuf is going to cost him dear."

"Eh?" O'Brien was startled. "You don't think—"

"Why think?" St. Rocher shrugged and yawned. "It's none of my business, but something is going to happen here, mark my word. Are you going to take his advice about the money?"

O'Brien nodded.

"Why not? Most of our goods will come ashore tonight. Temporize!"

In ten minutes an officer came to summon them; his fluent Castilian and his features indicated that he was a renegade, but he refused to answer their questions, and scowled at them with the savage hatred for which his kind were notorious. And so they came to the presence of Pasha Abdallah, a swarthy, bearded man clad all in white, his keen nostriled features proud and handsome, if somewhat vicious.

He sat upon a low leather seat in an alcove luxurious with cushions; two guards stood under the arched entrance, and a secretary sat writing at a desk to one side. This secretary, an old man, was obviously another renegade, as his Spanish testified; he acted as interpreter.

The pasha did not rise or return their greetings, but regarded them with cynical eyes, and his gaze came to rest upon O'Brien's handsome rapier.

"I should like to have that weapon," he said.

"Tell him to go to the devil," said O'Brien promptly. "I'll give him the sword if he can give me a better for it."

The pasha chuckled and clapped his hands. A slave appeared, darted away, came back in a moment with a sword in

a shabby leather scabbard, its hilt of plain steel. It was somewhat long, but when O'Brien drew the shining blade from the sheath and read the Latin inscription etched in the steel, he looked up quickly. It was a Ferrara blade made in 1654, and it bent almost double in his hands and sprang back again. A real Ferrara, barely forty years old!

"Does he offer this in trade?"

"Yes," said the secretary.

O'Brien promptly unbuckled his splendid but none too fine rapier and replaced it with the shabby but magnificent Ferrara blade. He was more than delighted with his bargain.

"Now let us talk business," he said. "We have brought gifts for his Excellency."

These had been fetched by slaves, and were brought in. The avid eyes of the pasha gleamed at the sight of them—handsome pistols, a few jewels and trinkets from Spanish loot, a casket of spices, and a huge necklace of red coral. This, as it chanced, was a real treasure in Moorish eyes, Fez being the chief coral mart in northern Africa, and the covetous eyes glittered sharply at sight of it.

Gifts for the two ambassadors—crooked knives of silver, and handsome white woolen *djellaba*, and boots of the finest Marrakesh leather, bright yellow in hue. The secretary explained that yellow boots were compulsory in Morocco by edict of Ismail, to celebrate the expulsion of the English from Tangier and the Spanish from the western ports. He then went on to say that the pasha would send men aboard the ship to guard it.

"Tell him," said O'Brien pleasantly, "that the ship and its contents are our own personal property, and we desire no guards."

The pasha amiably insisted that thieves were numerous and for some minutes the discussion waxed keen, until O'Brien compromised.

"Tell him that our men will allow no one aboard the ship without our orders, but that if he still wishes it in the morning, we may then consider the matter."

The pasha showed his teeth in a snarl and announced that he was master here, whereat O'Brien smiled and looked him in the eye and made no comment. Muttering angrily, Abadallah dismissed his visitors, saying they would settle the matter in the morning.

So their first day in Rabat drew to a close, with Raschid visiting them again in the evening. The ransom had not been paid; that would be arranged on the morrow, he said, and went his way. He wore an air of hurried importance, almost of arrogance.

St. Rocher sauntered out nonchalantly, and O'Brien sat for a while playing with his rapier and testing it. A marvelous weapon, he perceived; too long for general taste, but suiting him the better for this fault, and with a balance that was perfection. St. Rocher was gone a long while and presently returned in high good humor.

"I've been on the battlements," he announced. "To the top of the tower over the gateway. You must visit it sometime. The walls are two feet wide at the top—wide enough for a man to pass along easily. As I thought, the cannon can not be depressed to reach the ship even as she now is. I met the master gunner here; a droll fellow—a Dutch renegade. He was delighted to find that I understood artillery."

O'Brien gave him a sharp glance.

"What are you up to?"

St. Rocher laughed, but made no answer.

Morning found O'Brien waking to a keen zest in this unwonted life—the black eunuchs in the gardens; the thin calls of the muezzin from the *kasba* mosque, answered from the mosques of the town; the ungainly costumes; the strange sights and sounds all around. Then Raschid made his appearance, now with several Moors following him; these waited in the gardens while he came in and talked with the two ambassadors. He was brusk, excited.

"I must warn you," he said hurriedly. "The pasha will summon you shortly to his public audience; he is going to seize

your ship at once, and if you object, he intends to have you both flogged. There is no way out of it, though I shall do my best. Also, he is going to pay the ransom. Appease him, for the love of God! I came to warn you. Avoid any trouble—"

One of his followers called sharply from the garden, and Raschid hurried away.

"*Diable!* Something is up, assuredly," exclaimed St. Rocher. "Look! He is talking with the sharif, that red headed chap who brought us ashore. Now they've separated. Well, my friend, this looks serious. What answer have you to our friend the pasha, eh?"

"A pistol in each coat pocket, ready primed—" O'Brien smiled his rare, warm smile— "and you to back me up. What more could any man ask?"

St. Rocher laughed gaily and hummed a tune as he primed the little brass pistolets.

THE MORNING had waxed warm. In the cool shade of the huge guardroom beneath the tower, Pasha Abdallah held audience, while outside that wondrous gate, in the hot sun, the merchants and townsfolk came and went; black capped Jews from the Mellah, swaggering corsairs from the lower town and Sale, scowling renegades who bent black looks upon the Christians, Moors in from the country and even Berbers from the hills, blue eyed, tattooed, fierce and wild.

The pasha sat on a wide divan, placed in the cool depths at the rear of the chamber, facing the entrance gate; on the left was the high arched gate opening on the garrison barracks, with women and children congregated about the well before the mosque, and the fresh sea breeze sifting through. At one side of the pasha sat his secretary, on the other stood Sharif el Benouna, captain of his guard, naked scimitar in hand. Soldiers of the guard stood at the entrances; about stood several *talebs*, or doctors of the law, with stately merchants and officials, interspersed with ragged, filthy holy men such as abounded in Morocco.

Directly behind the pasha was an arched opening into the second and smaller chamber, whence ran a tunnel-like staircase to the ramparts and roof above.

O'Brien noted all this with a glance as he entered, and saw Santin in the crowd. The Frenchman nodded significantly, and O'Brien knew that all had gone well with the ship's lading during the night. Then, as the ragged holy men spat toward the infidels and muttered curses, the secretary interpreted a swift remark from Pasha Abdallah.

"Señores, it is the custom for all men, particularly Christians, to kneel before his Excellency."

"It is not my custom," said O'Brien, with a short laugh. "In my country, it is the custom for men to kneel to me also, but I do not insist upon it here. Neither let his Excellency insist."

"But he represents Mulai Ismail, the seed of Idris, the chosen of Allah!" exclaimed the secretary, as sharp murmurs began to rise.

"Does he, then, attribute to himself the prerogatives of Mulai Ismail, upon whom be peace?" said O'Brien shrewdly.

This was a trenchant stroke. The secretary had forgotten the usual blessing upon the name of Ismail; and the suggestion that he assumed the jealous emperor's attributes bit deeply. Before the dismayed secretary could collect himself, both ambassadors saluted the pasha with a deep and stately bow, which was compromise enough to be seized upon at once. But the angry face of Abdallah was ominous.

Stuffed leather seats were placed at the right of the pasha. The ambassadors seated themselves, and Abdallah made a lengthy oration, which the secretary shortened a trifle.

"Señores, you have rescued from the accursed Spaniard a prince of the line of Idris, upon whom be blessings, and have returned him to his own land. For this service, no reward would be sufficient; God alone can rightly recompense you. However, on behalf of Mulai Ismail—may his line be multiplied!—

his Excellency the Pasha Abdallah is pleased to bestow upon you a ransom of a thousand pieces of gold, which will now be laid at your feet."

There was a stir, and two pairs of black slaves entered, each pair carrying a large open pot, filled to the brim with gold pieces. The throng surged forward, one of the wild holy men haranguing his companions in low, vibrant tones. A figure appeared from the chamber in the rear carrying a silver dish of sherbet, which he set before the pasha. As the slave turned about, his hand shot out, touched O'Brien, and left in his hand a folded paper. Then he was gone again.

"Give him back half for the poor, St. Rocher," muttered O'Brien. "Make a speech of it—I'm busy."

St. Rocher arose, very stately and dignified, and began a flowery address. O'Brien opened the crumpled paper, and to his astonishment beheld English writing, ill spelled but legible. He scanned it swiftly:

> I be Will Dowling, master mariner, slave heer seven year & more. They bee going to kill you bothe. Rashidd planned itt with Benoona ye gard capn. Two curst holy men will atack you to gett ye pasha ye blame. Rashidd has bribbed ye gard & will take ye kasba & town to bee his owne. Gett to ye room behynde & I will meet you. We canot gett away & I will bee glad to dye fyting.

O'Brien crumpled up the paper, his brain working rapidly. No getting away —true enough! But he had his ship and men to think of, besides. So Raschid had formed a grand scheme, eh? Kill the two infidels, blame it on the pasha, seize the town and citadel—true Moorish intrigue. But no time now to think about it. Raschid was not here under the tower, either—

"Diable! Must I talk all day?" came in an aside from St. Rocher.

"Finish," said O'Brien. "Then sit down and listen."

St. Rocher made his final grand bow and sat down. O'Brien spoke rapidly, while the pasha made acceptance of the gift.

"No talk; obey orders. Watch those ragged holy men. Two will attack; you must take them both. That damned Raschid plotted it. When they jump, shoot."

"Understood," said St. Rocher, and just in time.

Two of the ragged men—men so greatly venerated in Morocco as to be exempt from all law or custom—took a step forward from the crowd, and one of them burst into a wild torrent of words. They were both half naked, unkempt long hair dangling about their lean, scarred cheeks, the light of madness in their eyes. The speaker's voice grew shrill and high; foam gathered on his lips. He was clearly working himself into a frenzy.

O'Brien could not look at St. Rocher—he was watching everything here closely, his eyes on the pasha, on the throng, on the sharif whose naked scimitar was ready to help the two holy men do their work. He quietly got one of his two pistols out, hidden by the lace of his cuff, and pinched fresh powder into the pan. A grim smile touched his lips as he waited, muscles tensed. The strong hand above! Well, with luck he would show these Moors—

Then it came, all in a flash. The shouting holy man, who had gradually worked forward, snatched out a knife and hurled himself at the two ambassadors, followed by his companion.

O'Brien had seen the tensed muscles, and swung around. The Sharif el Benouna, teeth gleaming in his red beard, was swinging back his scimitar. The report of O'Brien's pistolet blended with that of St. Rocher's. From the latter came a second shot.

Dropping his pistol, O'Brien had leaped —he was in the air even before the sharif, shot between the eyes, toppled backward. That swift, sure spring carried him behind the divan of the pasha, into the archway; leaning forward, he caught the pasha by the beard, jerked him backward, and held the Spanish poniard to his throat. Pricked, the hapless Abdallah subsided.

Only then did O'Brien give heed to what was passing before him.

The throng was spellbound, petrified with amazement. One of St. Rocher's bullets had failed to kill; the frothing holy man was dragging himself forward, knife in hand, blood trailing behind. St. Rocher, even as O'Brien looked up, drove his sword through the fanatic. The other lay on his face, dead.

"*Will Dowling!*"

"Aye, sir." Dowling was waiting in the "room behynde" as he said he would.

A wild burst of voices rose on the air, yet none moved to attack the two Christians, for O'Brien's dagger at the pasha's throat was threat enough, and tacitly eloquent. The half naked figure of Dowling appeared behind O'Brien, wild eyed, unkempt, knife in hand.

"Take my friend out to the gun platform and back," ordered O'Brien. "Tell every one that if you are harmed or if I'm attacked, the pasha dies. Move sharp! St. Rocher, go make the signal to the ship, and quick about it."

The two disappeared, with Dowling excitedly shouting as they ran.

The hubbub of voices was now deafening in the guardroom. A crowd was thronging in by both archways, uttering amazed cries at sight of the bodies, and of the pasha in O'Brien's hands; and yet upon all these men, black, brown and white, had descended a queer hesitation, as though some invisible power held them poised, incapable of action.

Then O'Brien saw the reason, and the peril. Men were talking rapidly to the guards, whispers were growing into full throated voices, and the name of Raschid seemed upon every lip. In the fierce eyes turned upon him O'Brien read gathering menace and peril.

He realized in a flash that his prisoner no longer availed him. The loyalty of the guards had been poisoned by their own commander, the sharif. The two ambassadors were to be cut down, the pasha was to be slain and later given the blame for killing the ambassadors; Raschid was usurping his brother's place, taking over Rabat, leaping into power by force of treachery and blood.

There was a surge forward, the beginning of a rush. Like a flash O'Brien leaped into action.

Abruptly abandoning his prisoner and slipping his dagger into its sheath, he darted upon the open pots of gold. Catching up the fat pieces in both hands, he showered gold upon the crowd, flung it at them and over them in handfuls. There was an instant of astonished silence as the gold fell among them; from outside came yells, a spattering discharge of musketry—then a din of voices burst out, eager and yelping as a wolf bark, and half the throng here began to squabble and fight over the gold. As O'Brien leaped back beside the pasha he sighted Will Dowling and St. Rocher, returning along the narrow street past the mosque at a dead run.

Now came a sudden irruption of men, yelling the name of Raschid. A swirl of fighting figures broke into the crowd; shots rang out, men shrieked and were cut down. Pasha Abdallah shrilled out frantic orders, but his voice was lost. Will Dowling, now in the inner room behind, panted out sharp English words.

"Back to the stairs, master! The pasha's with us now—let me go to the roof with him! He'll have men on the battlements who may hold true—do you hold the stairs! They'll be at us in a minute—"

True enough. Dowling plucked at the pasha's *djellab*, drew him through the archway. The mad swarm of figures was now sweeping forward. O'Brien drew sword and poniard, sprang back through the archway into the inner chamber. St. Rocher's wild, gay laugh rang out as he led the way to the stairs.

"They saw my signal, *mon ami!* And the tide's at ebb, to judge by her swing on the cable. Trust Fox to do it— Here, this way! Now for work, eh?"

Now for work indeed! Fox had his warning and must save himself. Here was life or death to be met full face.

THE STAIRWAY was like a high roofed, closed tunnel, running steeply upward. The lower entrance turned at right angles from the guardroom in a high, narrow passage. Halfway up the stairs was another right angled turn. With a bit of crowding, two men might stand abreast on the steps, but not with any comfort for sword play.

O'Brien stood at the entrance, watching the wild figures flooding forward at him, a slight smile touching his lips, his gaze cool and steady. In the outer chamber some were still fighting over the gold, others were pouring toward the stairs.

"Death to the Christians!" roared a voice in Spanish, and O'Brien marked out the renegade—a huge fellow priming a musket as he ran. Apparently nearly all the pasha's guards and followers had been swung into the plot.

As the wave of men and hungry weapons surged forward upon him, O'Brien quietly stepped back into the stairway and up a couple of steps. In a wild mass, the Moors hurled at the entrance, packing themselves about it in a jammed mass, those behind shoving the others on, the foremost wedged there and unable to get ahead. And then began a frightful screaming to Allah and his saints.

For the long Ferrara rapier was running red. Unhurried, deadly, it drove down at the wild faces, bit into man after man, overreaching the curved blades that slashed vainly. A pile of bodies began to block the foot of the stairs. Over them suddenly leaped the tall renegade, slipping in the blood and then flinging up his musket as he regained his balance. O'Brien laughed and drove the point into his throat before he could fire, and he died there.

"Make room for me!" shouted St. Rocher impatiently, from behind O'Brien. The latter drew back and lowered his blade. The enemy had fallen away momentarily.

"Faith, I need all the room myself!" he returned. "They'll be coming again—

What's that?"

A roar of cannon shook the air from somewhere outside the tower. After a moment of silence, a second followed. Then single cannon began to speak.

"Fox!" barked St. Rocher excitedly. "The *Kestrel* is going out—they let go one broadside, warped on the cable, let go the other! At the fort! *Diantre!* I'd like to be out there with her!"

"You're not alone in that wish," said O'Brien dryly. "But cheer up, friend. We've no lack of company here to heaven or hell. Lucky that slave gave us warning, eh? Watch out above, now! Here they come—I can hold them well enough—"

He still had one pistol unfired, and now held it primed and ready.

Across the pile of bodies leaped a black man, flinging up a musket. The pistol spoke first, however, and the black choked on his own blood. As the musket fell from his hands, it was discharged; richochetting slugs screamed around O'Brien, but harmed him not. Then came the Moors streaming upward, two by two this time, spears reaching up at the trim, erect figure barring the way.

In this moment O'Brien blessed the Ferrara blade. It sheared through a spear shaft like paper, and the point ripped into the bearer's face. The poniard warded another spear, and the long blade lunged down. Another man sprawled on the stairs. A spear thrust up, but a leap carried O'Brien back beyond reach. A swift glance showed him St. Rocher up above at the sharp angle, talking with two men there.

Now the spears drove upward, and beneath them a bearded black man crawled and suddenly flung forward, crooked blade sweeping out for the knees. O'Brien warded that, and the red Ferrara flicked down and transfixed the black; then came St. Rocher's voice, sharp and urgent:

"Down, O'Brien! Down! *Down!*"

Hearing it, O'Brien flung himself back, so that he lay half supporting himself on his hands. Two of the pasha's guards were behind and above, muskets ready. From the two guns came a

thunderous roar; bullets and slugs went shrieking and whistling, drowned in frenzied screams from the Moors choking the entrance below. O'Brien rose to find the stairs cleared and St. Rocher at his elbow. The two guards were hurriedly reloading their pieces.

"Up with you!" cried St. Rocher. "Things aren't so bad—Abdallah's got three more faithful men up above. These two will hold the stairs. *Faugh!* What a reek of blood and stinking bodies! Come along to the fresh air."

O'Brien mounted, and the two bearded guards grinned cheerfully at him as they took his place to hold the stairs.

Up to the sharp turn, then upward again. All this while had sounded an intermittent discharge of cannon; now there roared another crash of guns in unison, evidently a broadside from the *Kestrel.* O'Brien mounted the last steps and then emerged into the white hot sunlight and stood blinking around, sword in hand.

The top of this immense tower was a platform, broken only by two openings whence smoke might emerge from the fires in the guardroom, fifty feet below. This rectangular platform was connected with the ramparts at three points by walls. Each wall crest was two feet wide, with waist high machicolations. One of these approaches lay at the western angle, whence the rampart ran to a little turret above the sea, and so around the seaward face of the cliff, the other two were at the eastern angles, connecting the platform with the palace and with the ramparts surrounding the gardens.

At a glance O'Brien comprehended the capability of such a place for defense. Half a dozen cannon lined the walls, but with neither powder nor ball at hand. At one side stood Pasha Abdallah, talking with four of his guards and Will Dowling. The barracks and gun platform cloaked from sight all view of the harbor and river and seaward approach, but the whole of the city, with its markets and system of massive walls, lay outspread below, running down to where the marvelous Tower of Hassan bulked up reddish in the sunlight on the lower ground beyond.

Abdallah swung around to meet the two ambassadors, his eyes glittering, rasping words on his lips, curved sword bared in his hand. Will Dowling cackled out a wild laugh.

"He knows now you saved his life, master. He says you be great men and he'll take your orders."

O'Brien nodded.

"Can we get away from here?"

"Nowt hardly, master. That cursed El Benouna must ha' swung over most o' they guards. They have the palace, and there's fighting all over the city."

"Very well. Send one man down to get you a sword from the stairs, and then to keep watch in case our two there are overpowered; we can't afford to be caught in the back."

One of the Moors departed at a run. Two of the others were loading muskets. On the palace ramparts were now gathering masses of men, blazing away with wild bullets at the tower; from here and there about the city, chiefly at the gates, came the sounds of conflict and the hot rising smoke reek of powder.

"St. Rocher," said O'Brien crisply, "take one musket and go down to that seaward turret; you can hold it easily enough. Best hurry—there's a stream of men working around that way."

Dowling translated. One of the guards shouldered his musket, showed his white teeth in a laugh and swung away, following St. Rocher's sinister, tall figure along the rampart to the turret, thirty feet distant. O'Brien strode up to the pasha and clapped him on the shoulder heartily; their eyes met in a momentary exchange, and the Moor smiled and nodded comprehension. Both men knew there was no escape. Enemies such a little while ago, they were now comrades.

By the two eastern approaches, men were now streaming along the ramparts in single file, weapons glinting in the sun while their fellows still banged away with muskets and pistols. The Moor sent to the stairs returned with a scimitar, gave it to Will Dowling and hastened back.

"Tell the pasha to hold the right hand approach with his two men," said O'Brien. "You and I will take the other."

"Aye, sir. And do 'ee hold back a bit, master—nowt care I what haps, so be I get a crack first at some o' they devils!"

O'Brien scrutinized his unexpected helper for the first time. Dowling was not tall, but was lean and hard, all muscles. His rags showed scars on back and arms. His unkempt, gray streaked hair and beard framed features wild and savage as any Moor's.

Abdallah led his two remaining men to the spot indicated, and O'Brien was somewhat amazed to see him step forward, scimitar in hand, to meet the onrush himself. There was no time to waste in watching, however. Dowling was already bounding toward the other angle, where a number of men were coming rapidly along the rampart, and O'Brien followed with some misgivings, which were all too soon justified. A glance showed him that St. Rocher was already engaged.

The first man to run in upon Dowling was a huge black, swinging a crooked sword. Dowling leaped at him fiercely, and indeed launched a fearful blow which caught the black on the neck and half split him asunder; but the black toppled sidewise over the edge and carried the scimitar with him—all but carried Dowling as well.

Barely in time O'Brien stepped forward, the long Ferrara blade sliding neatly into the next man's throat, bringing him down in a sprawl athwart the narrow way, so that the next must needs step on his body. A pistol blazed, and the ball jerked at O'Brien's beaver, which he had retained throughout the tumult. A step forward, a lunge in tierce, and his man was down.

The pasha, with musket and scimitar at his back, was holding his angle nobly; O'Brien had yet to learn that those who held rank under Ismail must needs be men of their hands. But now some one of the bullets flying so wildly struck Dowling, who spun about and fell quiet. When O'Brien next could glance around, he saw one of the pasha's two Moors at his side, and waved his hand in thanks to the watchful Abdallah.

Now the attack faltered. Faced by a tall, hesitant Moor whose pistol twice missed fire, O'Brien leaped forward at him, thrust him through the hip, and he toppled over as he lost balance. This checked those behind, and they drew back fearfully. Abdallah had won his battle also, but not without loss—his musketeer was stretched out, and the pasha himself was bleeding from a swordcut across the brow. St. Rocher's left arm dangled, and his companion was clear gone from sight; but he waved his blade cheerily at O'Brien, for his attackers had drawn back.

"All well, Colonel?"

"Well enough for this time," called O'Brien grimly. "And you?"

"A scratch, no more." St. Rocher laid aside his weapon, removed his black coat, and set to work binding up his arm with his own torn sleeve. Suddenly a wild yell broke from him. "O'Brien! She's clear! She's clear!"

"Who is?"

"The *Kestrel!* She's in sight below here—" And St. Rocher waved frantically to the ship below, still well out of O'Brien's sight.

So Fox had fought clear! Good!

Dowling came to one elbow, then staggered dazedly to his feet. A bullet, with no great force behind it, had broken the skin of his head, but with no greater damage. Bullets were flying around still. The Moor beside O'Brien gave a sudden cough, clapped a hand to his throat and died with a smile and a gasp to Allah.

"The devil! We're fools to stay here," said O'Brien. "St. Rocher, we'll have to come over to your turret. Can we hold that?"

"Until they turn cannon against us—yes," came the response. O'Brien nodded to Dowling, as the pasha approached them, sopping blood from his forehead. "Call up the three men from the stairs. Tell him to go on to the turret yonder. We'll follow."

Abdallah nodded coolly, took the musket, powderhorn and pouch of his fallen man, and led the way. From the top of the little round turret at the seaward corner of the walls, with only the two approaches along the ramparts, the last defense could be made with some hope. Dowling summoned up the defenders of the stairs, but only one man came. The other two had been dragged down and slain. Thus, to hold the turret remained only St. Rocher, O'Brien, Dowling, and the pasha himself, with the last of the faithful guards. Two men could stand at the entrance, one facing either approach. As St. Rocher observed, it was not so bad; but it might be bettered.

From the turret, O'Brien caught his last glimpse of the *Kestrel*. With a fair breeze from the south, she had drawn out of the harbor, and not undamaged either, for her mizzen yard was down and a heavy shot had knocked a great hole in her poop. Still, she sailed on, bravely, and swiftly lessened and headed out westward, and that was the last of her.

WILL DOWLING laughed harshly, as the pasha clapped him on the shoulder, and turned to O'Brien.

"He's set me free, master—there's a rare jest for 'um! Well, he's an old warhorse, I've heard tell, and a good fighter. Won't be long now, eh?"

"Not long," said O'Brien, looking out across the roofs of the barracks. Men were gathering in the other turrets, crowding along the walls, spears and muskets in hand; upon the platform roof of the tower, a scant thirty feet away, were assembling yelling Moors, preparing for the assault from that angle. Their muskets were useless, however, so long as the defenders remained inside the round turret.

St. Rocher, who had donned his black coat again, laughed softly.

"So passes the high embassy to the Emperor of Barbary, eh?" he observed with faint irony. "Well, whether we go down among the fishes or leave our heads on Moorish pikes, what matter? No life endures forever! Still, I'd like to come face to face with our honest Raschid."

O'Brien nodded.

"Let's hope they attack, then. With nothing to eat or drink, we'd have a dog's death here, were they wise. Do you know, comrade, we've spoiled a most excellent plot! Had it come off aright, Raschid would be a great man. The pasha blamed for killing us, and slaughtered, and the place in Raschild's hands—it was a stake worth the gamble!"

"And for us—has it been worth the gamble?"

"Aye!" said O'Brien, and his eyes danced as he met the gaze of St. Rocher. "I'd do it over again, every bit of it! Well, they're coming. Who'll take the first round?"

Himself unhurt, he was joined by the Moorish guard, who had stripped off his *djellab*. Bullets hailed against the turret, as the lines of attackers advanced along the ramparts; as these came close, the fire died down. Spears extended, pistols banging away, the converging lines drew down, and O'Brien stepped out, the Moor beside him.

For a minute it was mad, fast work, but the long Ferrara blade and the steel wrist behind it drove home. A spear ripped O'Brien's coat—two men were down, blocking the narrow rampart. From the corner of his eye he saw the Moor lock arms with an antagonist and go hurtling over the edge; Dowling was in his place instantly, knife driving into the next Moor. Another yielded to the stabbing blade. Then the knife was gone, and Dowling was borne back, a spear in his hip.

St. Rocher saved him, neatly spitted the spearman; he stood cool and imperturbable, his blade dancing in and out, as Dowling dragged himself back to the turret. Spear and scimitar flashed in against O'Brien, and the Ferrara ran red again—but a man farther back flung a pistol that had flashed in the pan, and it struck him over the eyes.

Only the beaver saved him from being

brained. He staggered back, stunned, and came to one knee, clear out of it for the moment. With a fierce yell, the pasha was past him, flying at the attackers, crooked sword flashing and driving down. O'Brien sagged a little, head drooping; but luckily blood was running from his cut head and his brain cleared.

He lifted his head. A sudden silence had fallen. The attackers were drawing back. O'Brien came upright and leaned on the rapier, careless that it bent under his weight. Back drew the lines of men. On the tower roof appeared a figure in snowy white, backed by half a dozen guards bearing muskets. It was Raschid, and his voice came in Spanish.

"Señores! Can you hear me?"

"Yes," responded O'Brien.

Pasha Abdallah gave O'Brien a swift glance, nodded, and brushed past him to the turret. His harsh voice sounded in quick dialogue with Will Dowling, who lay there gripping his bleeding thigh; but O'Brien paid them no heed. He looked at Raschid, who had betrayed them all, and his eyes flamed angrily.

"Señores, you have fought well," said Raschild smoothly, "but it is useless, and now you are finished. The palace and *kasba* are mine. The town is in my hands, or soon will be. If you had not been hasty, if you had followed my instructions, you would have been safe and well. But I bear you no grudge, and I am proud of you, my friends! So come and join me, and between us there shall be brotherhood."

"And what of Pasha Abdallah?" said O'Brien.

"That is another matter," responded Raschid. "It is the will of God that he must die."

O'Brien turned and looked at St. Rocher.

"Well, comrade?" he asked. "What say you?"

St. Rocher inspected his red running rapier critically.

"My dear Colonel," he drawled, "I really perceive no defect in this steel, and I should regret to deem myself unworthy of so good a weapon. Also, it seems to me that we stand in very honorable company here, and could not better it. But make your choice, and I'll abide by it."

O'Brien swung around, and a joyous, hearty laugh rang from his lips.

"Liar and traitor!" he cried out, knowing that many of the Moors understood Spanish. "We trusted you, and you betrayed our trust. No lies will serve you; we know your whole plot. You betrayed those who welcomed you, and your own brother. May the curse of Allah rest upon you! As for us, we find it better to die with this man Abdallah than to live with a coward like you."

Raschid thrust back the hood of his white *djellab*. A spasm of rage contracted his bearded features; shaking his fist wildly, he poured forth a volley of curses.

A musket banged out.

Upon the breast of that snowy *djellab* appeared a stream of scarlet. Raschid was knocked back a step by the impact of the bullet, then fell in a huddled, motionless heap of white. A harsh laugh sounded from Pasha Abdallah.

"*Allah Akbar!*" he cried loudly. "God is great!"

He had quietly loaded and aimed their one musket, and that shot had come from his hand. One growing, tumultuous yell burst from the watchers as they realized what had happened; then muskets banged forth to right and left, and a hail of bullets spattered about the stones of the turret. O'Brien and St. Rocher drew back to cover, but Pasha Abdallah stood out in the open, shaking his musket at those who had been his own men, his blood spattered face and beard frightful to see. And though bullets tore at his garments, none touched him. A frenzy was upon the man, and as he shook the musket and poured forth a screaming torrent of Arabic, his appearance seemed to hold the Moors spellbound.

"Listen!" St. Rocher touched O'Brien's arm. "What is that sound?"

There was, indeed, a strange sound rising upon the hot, white sunlight—a rattling,

rising sound, a pouring thud of unshod hoofs lifting through the air like muttering thunder. The muskets fell silent. Men on the ramparts and about the edge of the great tower looked over and uttered shrill cries. From the turret, nothing of the street or town below could be seen, for the tower blocked the view, but of a sudden arose a fierce wild yell from hundreds of throats.

"Yusuf! Mulai Yusuf!"

The tide of men along the ramparts ebbed quickly; they fled, running, breaking up into groups. From below came a spatter of shots, then shout upon shout.

"Allah! Yusuf!"

Pasha Abdallah wiped the blood from his fierce eyes and swung about, and laughed.

Yet, for all his exultant laugh, O'Brien saw that his face was gray with fear.

Into the city and into the *kasba* rode Kaid Yusuf, followed by a horde of wild riders whose robes were spattered with blood; and now he sat among his chief men on the bloody divan in the guardroom and dispensed justice that was swift and terrible. Outside, in the fly swarming hot sunlight, grew a pile of heads.

O'Brien was led in, with St. Rocher at his side, and doffed hat in a low and sweeping bow, while Pasha Abdallah saluted the kaid with a kiss on the shoulder, as became the blood of Idris. O'Brien noted that Yusuf was a man of very dark complexion, obviously of negroid blood, with bloodshot eyes and an air of fiercely eager cruelty. He spoke briefly, and the pasha nodded.

"*Mektub!*" he replied. "It is written."

So saying, Abdallah strode from the guardroom with two huge black guards beside him.

Yusuf looked at the two ambassadors, while the pasha's old secretary addressed him rapidly, and Pierre Santin, behind him, put in a word or two. He beckoned, and they came forward, and a hard, glittering smile touched the dark Moor's features. He spoke, and the secretary translated.

"Señores, you are valiant men, and it is evident that you are under the protection of Allah. You will resume your quarters in the palace until word arrives from Mulai Ismail, upon whom be peace, respecting you. Whatever you may desire is yours. It is the command of Kaid Yusuf ben Ismail that each of you express a wish, that in honoring you he may honor Allah."

O'Brien gestured slightly, and St. Rocher made answer first.

"Tell Kaid Yusuf that we would have the company of an English slave who fought beside us, and who indeed warned us of this plot. Pasha Abdallah freed him; let this freedom be confirmed."

Upon hearing this, Yusuf fastened his gaze upon O'Brien. The latter smiled.

"Say to Kaid Yusuf," he responded in stately Spanish phrases, "that while it is true that Allah has protected us, this was to be expected, inasmuch as we are ambassadors to him whom you call the Sword of Allah." At this reference to the emperor, there was a quick hum of approval. "However," went on O'Brien, "a brave man fought with us, the Pasha Abdallah. It is my request that no blame and no harm come to him."

Upon hearing this, Yusuf gave a sharp order. Into the room was brought a blood soaked *djellab*, bundled up, and laid before him. A guard unfolded it, and laid bare the grinning head of Prince Raschid. With the head was a right hand, but not the hand of Raschid, for it was dark.

Yusuf looked down at the head, then spoke slowly; the secretary translated.

"Señores, your requests are both granted. The slave will be brought to your quarters and given freedom under the seal of the pasha and the Kaid. As for Abdallah, he remains unharmed; but, since his hand slew one of the sacred blood of Idris, that hand has already been removed from him. Go in peace, and may you be brought from the darkness of infidelity to perceive the light of the true faith!"

Such was the tale, and the end, of Raschid ben Ismail, Prince of Barbary.

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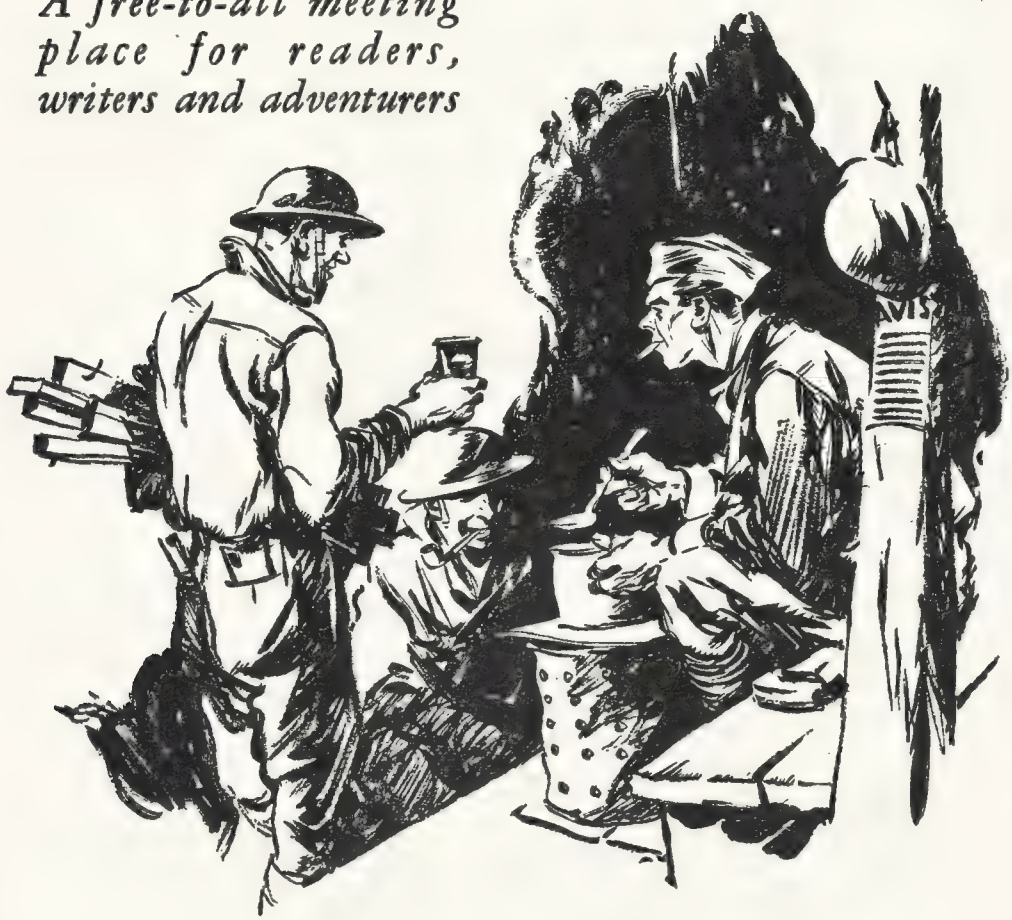

A NOTE from H. Bedford-Jones in connection with "The Prince of Barbary," in this issue:

The character of Raschid is not so bizarre as may appear. One of his brothers became a Christian and was last heard of at Paris. The crown prince of Fez, dispossessed by Ismail, became a Jesuit priest and is buried in Madrid. Nothing was too extraordinary to happen in the incredible day of Ismail, who demanded the niece of Louis XIV in marriage and who sent an embassy to James II offering to replace him on the English throne if he would become a "true believer."

The character and habits of Ismail outdo the wildest tales told of King Solomon; but they must be relegated to later stories. Nothing was too fantastic to be sober reality in Morocco of this period. A few years earlier, the pirates of Sale had established their own republic; a few years later, a prime minister of Spain was to become a Moorish pasha. The imagination is staggered by many of the sober facts of Ismail's reign. A mere buccaneer ambassador is no great stretch of fancy. Outside of this, I have stuck to fact throughout, have studied and filmed the places described in the story, and have seen the ghost of Ismail walking in the gardens of his palace; although my friend Souzan

claimed it was merely an overdose of red Algerian wine. —H. BEDFORD-JONES

CAPTAIN DINGLE, of our writers' brigade, puts in an oar in our buzzard controversy:

I hadn't thought the buzzard question would carry interest so long, or I might have spoken up before.

After the Bahamas hurricane of 1929, when the people in the stricken islands were eating drowned pigs and fowls, and pickings were slim for buzzards, I actually saw a buzzard take a running chicken that boys had chased out of the blind side of a dismantled hut. That is eye witness. A hearsay witness in the same islands seems to suggest that the blacks at any rate believe the buzzard will take chickens.

Regarding the condors on the Chinchas, I have loaded guano there and have seen the riflemen MacCreagh speaks of; but we were suspicious that the sharpshooters might nominally be there to shoot condors, but actually with a keen eye to preventing the wretched guano workers from escaping from their horrible existence. I think most old windjammer men who knew the Islands have had that belief. —CAPTAIN DINGLE

I AM glad to call your attention again this year to the Poppy sale campaign conducted by Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion during Memorial Day week. The flowers, made by veterans in Government hospitals, are sold solely to provide funds for the support and amelioration of the lives of the men invalided in the war.

As a tribute to America's soldier dead and as a worthy aid to the disabled living, wear a poppy on Memorial Day!

MORE about the "black widow."

Newport, Maine

I notice in the Feb. 1st *Adventure* that the question about the bite of the spider known as the "black widow" is again brought up.

I spent a year on a sugar plantation then being started in the province of Barahona, Dominican Republic. We had an abundance of one small variety of small black spider there. Whether it was the black widow or not I do not know. The body was about the size of a small bean, the legs fairly long. Neither the body nor the legs were hairy. It had a bright red spot on the under side of the lower end of the abdomen, hence the Spanish name of *Araño con cola colorada*. The larger ones also had three very small red spots on the upper part of the abdomen. These spiders were very poisonous.

In addition to my regular duties as irrigation engineer, a large part of the medical work for white men on my end of the job fell to me, as the regular doctor could only get out about once a week. One of the cultivation men was bitten on the side of his leg when he pulled his riding breeches on one morning. He was in severe pain for twenty-four hours, complaining especially of his knees. He described the pain as a jumping toothache in both knees, and to a lesser extent in all his joints. There was no swelling or pain where he was bitten. I finally found the mark, which was a red dot about the size of the prick of a very fine cambric needle. Around it was an area about a quarter of an inch in diameter which was very slightly red. The marks were so faint that it was hard to find them at all. The second day he was decidedly weak; in about the condition of a man recovering from the flu.

ABOUT four months later I was bitten myself twice in one night, in fact. The bites themselves felt like faint needle pricks. There was no pain, no swelling and no subsequent sloughing in either of the places bitten. In the circumstance I got an awful dose of the poison.

I do not remember how long it was before the agony started, but only a few minutes. My knees started first, then my ankles, my back bone, and practically every joint in my body followed. The description of a throbbing toothache in every joint in the body is the best one I can give. It was plain agony. This kept up all night, and in the morning I was so weak that they had to feed my breakfast to me. The heart or respiration was not affected in any way. I kept a close watch on them all night. The next morning the doctor happened to come out, and gave me merry hell for not sending for him when I was bitten. He gave me a shot of morphine and atropine, which made things much better. Could have given myself a shot the night before, but had no one in camp that I could trust to watch my heart action in case I went to sleep.

The second day I was able to get around camp and do some office work. I spent most of my time around the kitchen stove wrapped up in an old overcoat, and the thermometer about 95° in the shade. The following day I went down to the hospital, riding on the sunny side of an open car, with the old overcoat still around me. I felt exactly as I did when I got over the flu. The slightest exertion would throw me into a profuse perspiration. Would probably have been back to work in a day or two more if I had not gone down with typhoid.

Dr. Trickey, the company's doctor, claimed that the poison was the most virulent of any known insect or reptile, but that due to the small size of the spider and to its comparatively weak jaws only an infinitesimal amount of the poison got into the

circulation. He said that occasionally in the case of native children the bite had a tendency to slough out. This may have been due to an infection rather than to the bite.

If any one is particularly interested in this variety of spider, I imagine that any of the cultivation men of the Barahoña Co., Barahoña, Dominican Republic, could easily get them all the specimens that they desired. —P. H. GLOVER

RECENTLY there appeared anonymously in this place some actual notes from the diary of a member of the French Foreign Legion. It appears the writer is a very interested member of our Camp-fire circle; that his identity is known to three or four of you who have have been in correspondence with him. Here is a note from Georges Surdez, who knew him in the Sahara:

It was an odd, altogether new thrill for me to read the notes from a Legionnaire's diary in the March 1st Camp-fire, for the writer is a friend of mine. I knew many of the men slain in that combat. The Russian adjudant of the section was one of a group of his compatriots who did much to help me in the Sahara. Not long before that disastrous day, I was drinking tall glasses of cold beer with Legionnaire Cook, in a café at Colomb-Bechar. And I know that Cook was the man who "shaded his eyes with his hand till he died."

I have met the pilots of the planes, I know the officers who started out in an effort to avenge the Legion's dead. I have heard the story from most of the survivors, Legionnaires and native guides and scouts. On the other hand, I have attended Camp-fire as a member of the writers' brigade for nearly ten years, and was a silent member for six years before that. You can understand that I felt very much as if a remote friend had suddenly appeared in familiar surroundings.

OUR comrade, Frank Babylon, is right when he says that I will vouch for every word. The author of that vigorous relation told me his story before several of his comrades, who would have been prompt to howl at a mistake. He is a most interesting chap, and although only nineteen, the Legion is merely an adventure topping many others. He speaks six languages fluently, writes four.

Physically, he is five foot seven or eight, broad of shoulders, well muscled, and probably weighs 155. He is a mighty handsome kid, with light blue eyes, and looks like a clean-cut high school athlete in khaki. As he left home at fifteen and has been roaming since, one might expect him to be hardened, coarsened to some extent. In reality, he has splendid manners and is quite reserved until one knows him well.

YOU have noticed the superb restraint of his tale. He kept carefully to what he had seen with his own eyes, drew no conclusions, made no criticisms. Without straining truth or modesty, he might have set off his deeds to advantage. Sergeant K. (promoted from Corporal-Chief and awarded the Military Medal after the combat) told me: "He's a real Legionnaire. You can believe him." When you understand that Sergeant K. deems a colonel of the Legion a sort of earth-bound archangel and a "real Legionnaire" only nine little hops down the military scale, you will know that the story is authenticated less by anything I may say than by the reflection of his expert appraisal.

Dzhani (the maps bear the name Djilani, but the pronunciation is perhaps nearer the first spelling) was a bitter fight against odds. Of the sixty-odd Legionnaires engaged, fifty-one, I believe, were killed. The Italian lieutenant was gravely wounded, but survived. As for the gentlemen who engineered and carried out that ambush, they were Ait-Hammous, and their leader was said to be that Saharan will-o'the-wisp, El Haj Belkassem. Some time, I shall write for *Adventure* the tale of how the attacking natives escaped planes, mounted detachments of Legion and native cavalry, the motorized cavalry of the First Regiment of Legion Cavalry, groups of the Camel Corps. I could not understand it, consequently nosed about and found out the reason. Legionnaires have the natural sportsmanship of genuine fighting men, and I admit there was more admiration than spite in their admission of defeat. —GEORGES SURDEZ

THE following letter is in reference to one from Raymond S. Spears setting forth the conservation project of the American Trappers Association. Briefly, the idea behind it is that such wilderness areas where prevailing conditions prevent utilization for agriculture, grazing or other service could and should be kept forever wild—even to, as Mr. Spears asserted, the lowly coyote.

—Portland, Oregon

I have read Raymond S. Spear's remarkable letter in one of the recent issues. Two years ago when I read his famous poison story in *Adventure* I was sure he ought to be elected to something. It is indeed surprising to know that the trappers have become conscience stricken after they and their kind have ravished land, water and the sky of every living thing.

What I am writing about in this letter is coyotes. No one can put up a decent argument in favor of them. The coyote today lives on the best in the land and his fur does not pay the overhead ex-

pense of keeping him. All the trapping and poisoning campaigns have failed to budge him, but in sandy country where it is possible to dig into the dens to get the pups, it has certainly reduced the coyote population. The campaign against the coyote kills off many, but the remainder thrive in a remarkable manner. Twenty-five years ago, half of the coyote population was in a mangy condition, but today every one of them is slick as a corn fed mule.

There is no danger of the coyote being exterminated. Writing in a general way, north of the Overland Route, there are today just as many coyotes as ever. I am sorry to state that Mr. Spears' tenderfoot friends, as they lie snugly in blankets under western skies, will continue to have delicious chills running up and down their spinal columns, to the coyote serenade, for many years to come. —GEO. A. NORTH

THOSE of you who tuned in on Stations WJZ, New York, and WBAL, Baltimore, at 8 P.M. the last three Wednesdays have probably experienced something of a thrill to find our magazine "on the air". The program will continue to go on at this hour, and will consist of stories selected from current issues and broadcast in vivid dramatic form.

Because *Adventure* has for many years been dedicated to the task of discovering and printing the best stories of adventure to be obtained anywhere, and has thereby gained for itself one of the most loyal followings in magazine history, it is our hope that this feature will in the same manner soon commend itself to the radio public, by token of the high quality of the entertainment offered. And should this prove to be the case, we expect from time to time to add other stations to the list, until the broadcast area includes all of our country and Canada.

If you like "Moments of Adventure," please don't hesitate to write your Station and say so!—A. A. P.

OUR Camp-fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There are no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ASK ADVENTURE

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Yacht

AVOID big boats that are too cheap in price, recommends Mr. Knauer. Two hundred dollars wouldn't even buy a new mainsail for a fifty-footer.

Request:—"I have been wondering if it would be possible for one inexperienced to sail a yacht of about 45 or 50 ft. at sea with a reasonable amount of safety. When I say yacht I don't mean a racing yacht but a boat with sail and an auxiliary motor and, of course, a cabin. Also please tell me if two men would be sufficient crew. I would, needless to say, spend considerable time cruising in the Gulf before I left American waters.

I have recently received information of a yacht (55 ft.) that needs about $200 worth of overhauling for sale at the price of $400. I am sure that I could get a very good yacht near New Orleans, at a ridiculously low price during this depression. What do you think?"

—A. C. MAXTED, McComb, Mississippi

Reply, by Mr. A. R. Knauer:—Yachts smaller than 45′ or 50′ have cruised to all parts of the globe, but the big majority have been in the hands of men with years of experience. Your suggestion that you would spend considerable time cruising in the Gulf would give you an excellent opportunity to gain the foundation experience necessary, and would act as a shakedown cruise.

Personally I would hesitate to say that two men would be sufficient crew for a 50′ yacht, as I have had considerable experience with a boat of that size and can recollect many times when I could have used five or six men to excellent advantage. An acquaintance of mine has just left Manila for a cruise to New York on a 50′ sailing yacht, and his crew was either five or six, while the boat I am sure

was as able as his twenty-five years of experience dictated.

You state that you know of a yacht 55' long for sale for $400.00, and that it needs about $200.00 worth of overhauling. Offhand I would say you would stand more chance in buying a lottery ticket than of taking a cruise such as you outline in a boat to be purchased at that price. It's not impossible, BUT darned improbable, and I think you will find if you should buy this boat that your $200.00 repairs would be but a drop in the bucket, as $200.00 would not even buy a mainsail or go very far for new standing and running rigging of the proper quality. My suggestion is to lay off big boats that are too low in price.

Texas

RANGERS must be citizens of the State, men without fear who know how to ride, shoot and make an arrest against odds.

Request:—"I would appreciate it very much if you would send me some information on the work of a Texas Ranger.

1. How can I get a job as Ranger?
2. What are the age limits?
3. How much wages are paid?
4. Do you have to have Service in the U. S. Army?"

—RAYMOND A. STUBLER, Halethorpe, Maryland

Reply, by Mr. J. W. Whiteaker:—1. To get on the Texas Ranger force a man has to be a citizen of Texas. Know how to ride a horse and shoot a rifle and a revolver. Be a man without fear to do his duty in upholding the law. Rangers often have odds to fight in making an arrest.

A Texas Ranger is a peace officer, but he is not confined to any certain locality. He is sent from one part of the State to another wherever the law is to be enforced. He is sent where there are rioting, cow thieving, smugglers, bandits, bootlegging, etc.

There is a standing force of about 65 men, but this can be increased in time of need to as many as are needed to take care of the emergency.

2. The ages range from 23 years to 40 years, except in the cases of the captains of the different companies, who have been in the service for many years. A ranger is taken in for a period of two years, but can re-enlist for as many terms as he gives good service.

3. The pay is $150 per month for privates; $175 per month for sergeants; and $225 per month for captains. They are allowed $30 per month for living expenses, and when sent to other sections of the country on duty their traveling expenses are paid. Rangers have to furnish their equipment but this is sold to them at cost by the State and is deducted from their pay. When a horse is killed in action the State pays for it at the market value.

4. You do not have to have any Army experience to get on the Ranger force but ex-Service men are given the preference. There is a long list of applicants on file at the Ranger headquarters, so a person has to wait his turn to join.

Slovenian

SINCE the time of Charlemagne the history of the Slovenes has been a desperate struggle for national existence—with the Turks on one side of them and the Austrians on the other.

Request:—"Being a Slovenian, I have been quite interested in the country of the Croatians and Slovenians. In fact I was born there and brought to this country at three years of age.

Who are the Slovenian people, where did they come from and from what race did they originate?

Are they related in any way to the Slavic races of Russia and Poland? Were they a nation at the time of the Romans?

Is it true that prior to the Turkish invasion they were a powerful nation and were nearly destroyed by the Turks, and later taken over by the Austrians?" —JOHN ZOKAL, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Capt. W. W. Jenna:—The Slavs are a branch of the Aryan race. In the 4th Century they lived in great numbers in the neighborhood of the Carpathians. The Slavonic tribes of Croats and Serbs settled between 634 and 638 in what is now the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The Slavs had at one time settled and spread northward to the Baltic and southward to the Adriatic; they occupied Thrace and also peopled Bohemia and Moravia and, before the end of the 6th Century, penetrated into Translyvania, Hungary, Upper Austria, Styria, Carinthia and Carniola and finally spread over modern Russia. They lost, in time, the Elbe and Oder regions, Upper Austria, Carinthia and Styria to Germanic tribes. Large parts of Transylvania and Hungary fell to the Roumanians and Magyars. Parts of the region south of the Danube went to Greece and the Turks.

The Slavs may be divided into three groups: (1) The Eastern Group, Great Russians, Little or Malo Russians, and White Russians; (2) The Western Group, Poles, Czechs and Serbs or Wends; (3) The Southern Group, *Slovenians*, Serb-*Croats* and Bulgarians.

The history of the Slovenes is a desperate struggle for national existence since the time of Charlemagne to the present. The Slovenes kept no early records, so their acts and early history are hidden. They came to their present home at the western end of the Jugo-Slav kingdom about the close of the 6th Century. Ancient Slovene territory included almost one half of what was the World War time Empire of Austria. In the past, all Carinthia was Slovene. The Slovenes usually lived on excellent terms with the Lombards. It was with the help of the Slovenes that the Lombards took Mantua and Cremone from the Romans; this in 568 A.D. Lombard history

makes frequent allusions to the Slovenes, and the Slovenes' strength was so highly esteemed that the Lombards frequently sought their alliance.

Note: ¡The Western Roman Empire ended in 476 A. D., so you see it was 92 years after the fall of the Western Roman Empire that the Slovenians invaded Italy with the Lombards, so it is uncertain as to whether they were an organized nation at the time of the Roman Empire or not, but we can presume that they were a strong people, certainly.

About 625 A. D. was the beginning of the Carantanian State Epoch. Carantania seems to have been a federation of commonwealths without a king of any kind. The Slavs had a very great King, by name of Samo, and he welded these commonwealths together and formed an Empire out of Slavonic Central Europe. The Slovene National Commonwealth practically came to an end in 772 and Slovene independent political life formally ended in 843 when it was definitely severed from the rest of Jugo-Slav territory and the frontier of the German Empire was set up between Slovene lands and Croatia.

It appears that from the close of the 6th Century up until 843 the Slovenes were a very powerful people and even after 843 their speech and political tradition did not end. The Turkish wars created a powerful bond of union between the Slavs, not merely because of the common danger and necessity of defense, but also because the Turkish invasions drove many of the more southern Slavs northward and these migrations, by intermingling the north and south, greatly strengthened their sense of racial unity. The Turks overran Thrace and Macedonia in the 14th Century and it was in 1389 that the Serbs became tributary to the Turks. It became a Turkish province about the middle of the 15th Century and remained so for nearly 200 years. In 1718 Austria received the greater part of Serbia, but in 1739 it was transferred back to Turkey. In 1815 Serbia won its independence. It is presumed that this history is probably parallel to that of the Slovenes. Croatia went to Hungary in the 11th Century.

You can see that there is very little difference between a Slovenian and a Croatian. The Croats are a Slavonic people from the western Carpathians.

North

GREENLAND—proving ground for Polar explorers.

Request:—"Having been born 100 miles north of the Arctic Circle in northern Sweden, I am naturally interested in the Arctic.

1. Has all of northern Greenland been completely explored?
2. What animals, if any, are to be found there?
3. Do many Eskimos live in northern Greenland?
4. What is the best time of the year to travel in Greenland?
5. Must you get permission from the Danish government before you may travel in Greenland?"

—HOLGER E. LINDGREN, Olympia, Washington

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—1. Yes, the entire north coastline and islands have been mapped, the last work having been done by Lauge Koch, in 1921. Peary made trips in 1892-'95 and determined the insularity of Greenland and that its extreme north limits did not extend beyond 84° N. He mapped a portion of it. Knud Rasmussen mapped more of it in 1912, in fact connected with Mikkelsen's work done two years before, which included the coast from Denmark Harbor to Independence Bay (which latter is as far east as Rasmussen went). Incidentally, most of the interior ice cap of the north section was crossed or seen. Lieut. Brainard on the Greeley Expedition of 1882-4 sledged up the west shore to about the Sherard Osborn Fiord, and Peary and Rasmussen connected with that work.

2. With the cessation of the ice cap back of Peary land and Independence Bay, all the extreme north region is ice free the same as is much of the coastal land bordering Smith Sound. Abundant vegetation in summer supports a fairly large amount of animal life of musk oxen, hares, lemming, caribou, fox and wolf. Only a few of these animals have worked east in a few spots from the Peary Land country: musk ox, hare and lemming, and more recently wolf and fox, both white and blue. Walrus are in Smith Sd. and Kane Basin. Not mentioned on north shores. The south limit of this animal life seems to be about Scoresby Sound. I don't wish to overlook one other animal of the north region—the ermine. Then there are the summer migrant birds and the sea animals: polar bear, seal, whales, snow bunting, snowy owls, gulls and snow geese. Both Peary and Rasmussen maintained themselves up there on musk oxen meat.

3. The only Eskimos (Innuits) north of the latitude of Melville Bay, are the Smith Sound natives, called the Etah people. No permanent stone igloos are found at all in the north coast region, but there are a few tent rings, very old, showing that some hunters visited it at some time.

4. Travel by ship or steamer to Greenland can only be made from about June to September on account of the ice. By sledge, you can travel at any time during the winter from October to April.

5. No one may enter Greenland, not even a Dane, without first obtaining a permit from the Danish Government.

Sugar Men

"RIDERS of the cane." Who would want the job at eighty cents a day?

Request:—"There was an article in *Adventure* some time ago called "Riders of the Cane." What I wish to know is where I might apply for such a job." —JAMES A. DEHART, Flint, Michigan.

Reply, by Mr. John B. Leffingwell:—From the point of an author or artist, "Riders of the Cane" would naturally seem very romantic, while actually this work is done by the simple *guajiro* or country man. In years when cane has some intrinsic value the pay varies from a dollar and a half to two dollars

per day, but today with sugar at its present price and the prohibitive duty required by the United States on its import (2 cents the pound) the wage of the cane worker has dropped sadly. I should say that eighty cents a day is the average pay.

In regard to your securing work—not a chance in a million, as naturally Cubans have the preference and today Cuba has a large unemployment proposition on its hands.

Rattlesnakes

THEY don't lay eggs, but bring forth their young alive; they're ovoviviparous.

Request:—"Are all rattlesnakes oviparous or do some species bring forth their young alive?"

—FRANK WARDLOW, Los Angeles, California

Reply, by Mr. Clifford Pope:—Rattlesnakes bring forth their young alive. Records of rattlesnake eggs are either erroneous or based upon observations of newly born rattlers still enclosed in the membrane which surrounds them during development.

With very few exceptions, all true as well as pit vipers bear living young—they are ovoviviparous.

Last month a tragic motor accident took the lives of Horace Kephart of the A. A. staff and Fiswoode Tarleton of our Writers' Brigade. The passing of these two men was a loss to American literature, to that of the Southern mountains in particular. Kephart, deep student of nature, was a friend of statesmen as well as mountaineers. Tarleton's stories of the hill-billies won praise from literary critics and casual readers alike. No less than in their native hills will they be missed by the editors and readers of *Adventure*.

Paul M. Fink, friend of both, is going to carry on Horace Kephart's Ask Adventure section—Camping and Woodcraft—as he says, "not as Kep did, for he was inimitable, but to the best of my ability, as a sort of memorial to one for whom I had the deepest affection and in whose friendship I was honored."

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelope and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 303 Laurel Ave., Libertyville, Illinois.

Motor Boating GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, New Jersey.

Motor Camping MAJOR CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M. D., care American Tourist Camp Assn., 152 West 65th St., New York City.

Yachting A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Place, Chicago Ill.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, legislative restrictions and traffic.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

Automotive and Aircraft Engines *Design, operation and maintenance.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, *including foreign and American makes.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 939 Timberman Road, Grandview, Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Box 322, Westfield, New Jersey.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D.

Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Box 322, Westfield, New Jersey.

Camping and Woodcraft Paul M. Fink, Jonesboro, Tennessee.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere in North America. Questions on mines, mining, mining law, methods and practise; where and how to prospect; outfitting: development of prospect after discovery; general geology and mineralogy necessary for prospector or miner in any portion of territory named. Any question on any mineral, metallic or nonmetallic.* —VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Precious and Semi-precious Stones *Cutting and polishing of gem materials; principal sources of supply; technical information regarding physical characteristics, crystalography, color and chemical composition.*—F. J. ESTERLIN, 210 Post St., San Francisco, Cal.

Forestry in the United States *Big-Game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and products; economic possibilities; distribution; exploration, etc. No questions on employment.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care of Insular Forester, Rio Piedras, Porto Rico.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk, General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Ripon, Wisconsin.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Martime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS V. GREENE, U. S. N. R., 333 Fifty-fourth St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

U. S. Marine Corps CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, 541 No. Harper Ave., Hollywood, Cal.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. Parachutes and gliders. No questions on stock promotion.*—LIEUTENANT JEFFREY R. STARKS, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

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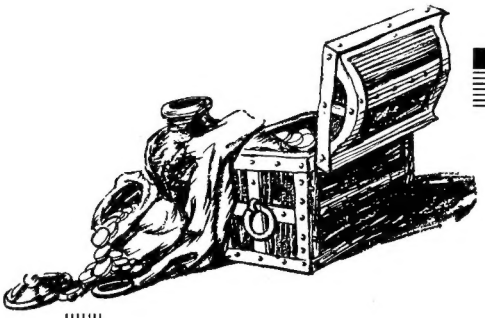

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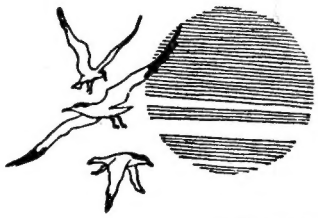

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